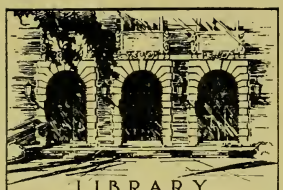

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AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL

VOL. II.

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AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL

BY THE

COUNTESS M. VON BOTHMER

AUTHOR OF 'GERMAN HOME LIFE' ETC.

'Beware the Ides of March!
'He is a dreamer; let us leave him: Pass!'

SHAKESPEARE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
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1883

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	Les Absents ont Toujours Tort	1
XVIII.	The Veiled Prophetess	20
XIX.	'Let the Stricken Deer Go Weep'	33
XX.	Strolling Players	42
XXI.	Rebellion	69
XXII.	Lord George Peveril	79
XXIII.	A Clerical Error	101
XXIV.	Solitude	137
XXV.	A Rivederlà	168
XXVI.	'The Old Order Passeth Away'	177
XXVII.	Ivan and Chelanska	224
XXVIII.	Hidden Enmity	238
XXIX.	Hero's Last Song	269
XXX.	The Tchorni-Narod	294

AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL.

CHAPTER XVII.

LES ABSENTS ONT TOUJOURS TORT.

'You are right, *ma belle* Helena Paulovna, but then you are one of the favoured of the earth. Why, indeed, should you attempt to disguise your loveliness?'

'It is not that, Julie. But as I am often in this street on charitable quests, and as one of my orphanages and the hospital I visit are in the district, there is no earthly reason why I should not be here one day as much as another; in one house as well as in another. It would be preposterous in me to dress for the part—the very way to attract the attention I wish to avoid.'

'Ah! how often I have wearied of and rebelled against all these precautionary measures, and to no effect!'

'The Countess Perowsky is guided by common sense; what she says is perfectly true,' puts in Mellin's inexpressive monotone.

'I, for my part, never pretended to common sense,' Madame de Kerezoff remarked with some asperity.

'Because yours is uncommon, *ma chère*,' Helena answered with a smile and a suave inflection of voice that seemed like the softest of caresses. 'But we are not here to bandy compliments. We are here in the interests of the Cause.'

'Is Kerezoff coming?' asked Mellin, looking across at Julie.

Somehow the good understanding was not so perfect amongst them as it might have been; as, in fact, it had been at an earlier period. Kerezoff had shown himself to be refractory on more than one occasion. 'I wish we could get out of all this,' he had said to his wife, 'and go and live quietly in France and Germany for a few years. Where is the use of having money, or of earning money, if it all goes like this, and gives one no comfort?'

He was jealous, and ashamed, as an old married man, the father of a family, to show his jealousy. And it all led to nothing. One

expatriated oneself, and one subjected oneself to vicissitudes of climate, and one endangered one's career and one's health, and all to no purpose. His wife's diamonds had gone; and as often as he saw the paste that replaced them, he inwardly fumed and fretted at the exaction and sacrifices which he ought to have taken as a matter of course. Why should it be suggested that Prince Karishkin's millions of roubles would only become a circulating medium at some watchword known to no one but his, Kerezoff's, wife? He had had his grievances, like the rest of the world, but of late the Government had given him no cause of complaint, and he would have liked at length, after so many concessions, to be quiet. He would lay down no more lines of railway if all his emoluments were to go the way of his wife's diamonds. It was very well for Julie; of course she *had* a grievance, but, after all, her vengeance must, at best, be but feeble and ineffectual, and would not, and could not, repair the past.

Mellin, suspicious of Kerezoff, let fall to Julie, now and again, a word pointed only too clearly at the lily-livered lukewarmness of her husband. Such words were secretly taken in ill-part. 'It is all this preposterous exaggera-

tion of secrecy that wearies him, as it does me,' she retorted. 'I should throw up the whole thing myself, but——'

That 'but' represented her sister, who, cheated out of her bridegroom by a dissolute Grand Duke, very much after the fashion that Jacob was cheated of Leah, found herself, the morning after her marriage, a widowed wife, and worse still, an outraged and ruined woman.

It was difficult to find any safe official form for such a complaint as hers. To the lover, who had been sent off 'on urgent political affairs' on his very wedding-day, she was ashamed to write. They two, so she felt, could never meet again. And, when at last she did find a method of appealing to the world, and public opinion pronounced against the Tarquin lover, an action for treasonable slander was the result. Overcome by her mingled despair and the sense of baffled vengeance, the wretched woman had shrieked out her curses, accusations and threats against the Imperial family in the open courts, after a fashion which soon put a gag in her mouth, and manacles about her fragile wrists, and sent her clanking at the tail of a female gang, along the route of expiation to

Siberia. Julie, her twin-sister, swore to avenge the injured girl's cause; and, from a frivolous butterfly of fashion she became a woman, worldly still, it is true, to outward appearance, but inwardly the embodied spirit of implacable revenge. She would hear of no lukewarmness, she would suffer no treason; she would sacrifice husband and children if needs be; but, having put her hand to the plough which was to break new ground for oppressed humanity, she would not turn back, nor permit anyone belonging to her so to turn.

For convents and the religious life, unlike the lovely Countess Perowsky, she had no vocation. 'No! I must go into the world,' she said, 'because in the world I have an opportunity of spreading an ever-widening circle of rebellion. I must use my opportunities and work out, on comedy-lines, my grim drama of vengeance.'

But she hated Mellin for divining her husband's laggard spirit, and feared the consequences to an innocent man of his suspected lukewarmness, whilst she resented anything like a jeer at Kerezoff's uxorious weakness.

The man who ought to have been her brother-in-law, but was so in name only, never

came back to avenge his Lucretia's injured honour. The dissolute Grand Duke was at the head of the office in which the young man worked, and therefore he had no choice but to obey his superior's orders and go on the appointed journey. A merciful fever shortened his troubles; and on hearing of his death—'I have inherited a double legacy of vengeance' —Julie said, and braced herself up to fresh exertion. Of her sister she had now been long without tidings. Bakounine had seen her during the time of his Siberian exile, and had even communicated with her by one of those mysterious means known to prisoners only. But Bakounine, long since dead, had been an old man compared with the child-wife, whose very youthfulness had made her remarkable even amongst the many remarkable victims of Official suspicion. Probably she would be no longer recognisable even to her twin sister; for, as Madame Kerezoff was wont playfully to observe, without her 'war-paint' she was already deep in the sere, the yellow of autumnal life.

'She may be dead,' Kerezoff said to his wife.

'Dead or alive, vengeance is mine, and I

will pay my just debts,' she answered, doggedly. 'If Marie be really dead, all the more reason that she and her sufferings should not be forgotten.'

As to Paul Perowsky, there were no lengths to which he was not prepared to go.

'You want to punish your faithless lover?' he, with coarse directness, asked his wife, when the public secret, which only her return revealed to her, came to be spoken of between them.

'I do.'

'And your false sister?'

'Her, through him.'

'There will be no whining and half-measures when it comes to the point?'

'None.'

'But how am I to know?'

'It is not for you to know, though you may know it. I have taken the oaths of the Society.'

'But there are oaths of three grades.'

'I have taken them all. I am pledged.'

'Then I will help you.'

And Perowsky, who harboured an undying resentment against his Imperial master for his unforgiving forgiveness in that matter of the

appropriated millions, with whom it still rankled that his wife had been set over him, the mistress of his fate, the possessor of his degrading secret; who raged at the thought of being called a non-entity, a tool, a slave, a 'thing,' by the boon companions whose jests were not always flavoured with delicacy, was prepared to carry out retribution to the bitter end.

As for her—gracious, lovely, smiling, and inscrutable—she opened her doors to the world, and, her life being all her own, devoted herself to society as a means to an end.

Society said it was ill-health, delicacy, inability to bear late hours, that had kept Helena Perowska so long secluded at Semonow. No allusion was made to Katchaloff; and if her return to St. Petersburg celebrated her downfall on the one hand, on the other, her life was one long procession of social triumphs. She became the fashion, and, for once, courtiers forgot to be sycophants, and forsook the throne-room for Countess Helena Perowska's 'at homes.'

She never went to Court.

Gracious messages reached her from various female members of the Imperial family, but she begged, on the score of delicate health, to be

received during the forenoon hours, privately, and her plea was unquestioningly accepted.

Of course it was known and understood that every night her drawing-rooms were thronged with a representative crowd, which revolved round her as its centre, and of which she walked the queen.

Her days were devoted to good works. She had a past to expiate, and her piety, deeply tinged with mysticism, became a strange compound of bigotry and rebellion.

Had things gone well with her, as once she had believed they would, she would have felt no pang or scruple as to her Egeria relationship to this modern Numa. Her heart—pure, virgin-gold—had, in the first instance, been won to tenderness through loyalty to family traditions and sympathy with her lover's pathetic plea of crowned loneliness. If she could comfort that aching heart, soothe that troubled spirit, bring peace and companionship, home joys, gentle interests and simple pleasures into that barren, solitary, loveless life, surely it was well that petty scruples should not prevent the accomplishment of the miracle. If she could make the desert of an arid heart to rejoice and blossom like the rose, it was not

for selfish calculations, would-be virtue, or worldly prudence to count the cost. For how much was He not already blamed of which he was utterly blameless?

She would injure no one, nor usurp any other woman's rights. The long entombed were not more dead to him than the wife to whom the Law and the Church had bound him years ago.

There was a saint the more, and a woman the less, since the Empress had declared that she would live, as nearly as possible, the life of a cloistered nun, and had renounced definitively the fiction and the fetters of wifehood. And Helena had, in very truth, been to him as the Egeria he had pictured in his pleadings. She had softened him; she had urged the cause of mercy and longsuffering against the extreme measures of the harsh, official persecutors by whom he was surrounded, and whose cruelties were, by a false semblance, made to appear his own.

Apart from the irregularity of the tie, her relationship had been, so she thought, as blameless and harmless as it had been happy. It had been for the people's good, and it had saved from despair, and from the haunted

hypochondria of lovelessness and suspicion, the Father of his people.

In the very earliest days of his romantic passion, she had shown the tenderness of her nature and the largeness of her sympathies by throwing herself heart and soul into the people's cause; and, despite the opposition of his nobles, despite his native timidity of character, the Sovereign carried out the beneficent day-dream of his youth, and gave freedom to twenty-two millions of his faithful subjects.

The dying Nicholas had, by implication, given his consent to the emancipation of the serfs. 'The present system will last my time,' he said to the hot and angry disputants; 'those who come after me can do as they choose.'

Despite the story of shameless peculations, reckless extravagance, and barefaced robbery in his own peculiar department, General Miloutine was liberal-minded enough, after the bitter experience of the Crimean war and the consequent humiliation felt throughout the Empire, to press upon his Imperial master the necessity of stringent army reform. Helena joined her prayers to his, and urged that respect for his august sire's memory would not be best

shown by perpetuating blunders, but rather by causing the remembrance of them to perish.

Military service was made compulsory, but the private soldier was taught to read and write, and was obliged to serve only six years, after which he was put upon the reserved list, and served yet another five years in the militia; at the end of that time he was discharged; and carried the fruits of education, experience, habits of order, cleanliness, and punctuality into civil life with him, thus increasing the general stock of material comfort and education. Other concessions spared the career of professional men the terrible loss of time, and the consequent laborious study, by which they had to make up for periods spent in military duty, whilst the term of their service was reduced to a minimum.

All these reforms made in the noblest spirit of enlightenment and toleration, slowly and by imperceptible degrees, yet none the less surely, formed the basis of that more widely-spread civilisation which has been the acknowledged need of Russia since Peter the Great first awoke to a sense of the barbarism which made his country the by-word of Europe.

In these, as in all educational and social

reforms, Helena Perowska lent her enthusiastic aid on the side of progress. It was her day-dream that her Sovereign Master's name should be the watchword of beneficence, reform, and humanity. No ignoble ambition. And if even these concessions failed to satisfy the disaffected, it was, she told him, because they expected impossibilities of one man, and because in their blind cavillings they failed to recognise the immense legacy of ignorance, abuse, and corruption which he had inherited with sceptre and crown.

Ardent, romantic, and worshipping a dual divinity in the man whose nature seemed to her godlike, and whose power was illimitable, whose mercy, 'mightiest in the mightiest,' ever tempered justice, who was an Autocrat, knowing neither 'self' nor 'will,' less the Emperor than the Father of his people—the woman poured out the whole treasure of her devotion at his feet, and knew neither scruple nor fear.

And yet all this had proved null and void, vain and of no effect—through no fault of hers, through no loss of his admiration, no forfeiture of his esteem, but simply through the mischance of her prolonged absence.

Faithful in absence that weak, vacillating, insufficient nature could not be.

At once sentimental and material, it required the perpetual presence, the sympathy, the charm of touch, the force of contact, the influence of the person beloved, to realise all the value of that guiding, saving power which is to some natures as the breath of life in the nostrils.

Helena Perowska absent, her liege was listless; then, on a fatal day, when his heart-emptiness and his brain-apathy were more than ordinarily apparent and oppressive to him, he saw Zoe Gourokowsky, and Helena was forgotten!

To him, in his self-deception, it seemed that he had only found Helena herself again, yet found her with a difference. It was a softer, sillier, more childish (though not more innocent) Helena.

She, the absent one, had always, even in the heyday of her brilliant youth, been serious, sweet and serene, but serious with an air of gentle dignity and wisdom—a grave earnestness about her that was only not severe because so soft and soothing in its womanly grace. And she, this young goddess, this Pallas Athene, this

willing sacrifice, this latter day Iphigenia, this wise, modest, enthusiastic devotee, the Egeria of his solitary dreams, had perhaps been a little too consistently perfect, too uniformly flawless in her conduct and conclusions. A dash of *espièglerie*, a trifle of coquetry, a touch of daring, a pout to-day, a shrewish word to-morrow, a caprice the next day, might have relieved the dull monotony of perfection.

One grievance, indeed, Helena herself imagined her Imperial lover might have against her. She was childless, and now—now that her eyes were opened—she told herself that the Divine wrath had manifested itself after this fashion, and that what, in the exaltation of her feelings, she had mistaken for a mission, was in truth a Satan-inspired sin, to be expiated by lifelong propitiatory sacrifices. But to make expiation by good deeds, by helping the sick and poor, by orthodox penitential observances, could only express one half of Helena Perowska's mind; of what she herself would have called the religious, and her enemies have designated the bigoted side of her character.

In her there was another and a stronger woman, and that other woman, in the name of

outraged love and desecrated worship, indignantly invoked exemplary vengeance.

There were plenty of people about her ready to make such vengeance both possible and plausible. It was to be wreaked in the name of suffering humanity, and if private wrongs were avenged at the same time with public grievances, there could be no reason to object to the comprehensiveness of the final retribution that would overtake the offender.

'My impulse was to hurl his gifts in his face,' she said, when she told her husband how her late liege had sent emissaries, with lands, and gold, and jewels, and conciliatory messages to appease her indignation.

'But you did not?'

'No. I had to lay it before the Executive.'

'I should have been for the hurling.'

'And so was I—but——'

'Well?'

'It was ordered otherwise. There is a refinement of vengeance in using Government money to compass the downfall of Government. To print and publish a man's misdeeds, at that man's own expense, but without his knowledge, is an exquisite satire on "such shabby gene-

rosity as can think gold will salve the wound that honour feels."'

'Still, I would rather have flung such largesse back at the emissaries who were his instruments.'

'So would I, only that there could be no such flinging. This will be slower, but it will also be surer. His money, his gifts and his treachery, as birds come home to roost, will all come back to him, only in another form.'

On the present occasion both ladies had brought large sums of money to Mellin's garret. There was much activity amongst the brethren just now, and an important meeting was to come off shortly, but as yet the day had not been fixed.

'I must take some of your *Ikons* and medals for my orphans,' Countess Perowsky said, leaning over the pedlar's open pack that lay upon the table beneath the dirt-begrimed window.

Julie, as she had come with the Countess, and therefore, might, on this occasion, be supposed to merely accompany her friend in her good works, wore a simple brown costume, not intended in any sense as a disguise. They

had arrived together, and together they would depart.

'Then we shall hear when the lots are to be drawn?'

'Of course. You must be present. It might fall to you, if fate were kind, to draw the highest number.'

'And your Englishwoman? What of her?' Julie asked shrewishly.

'What Englishwoman? I love Englishwomen,' said the lovely Russian, in her full plaintive voice; 'they are so independent, so happy, so unsuspicious, so free!'

'I do not think the Martello, or her Martellina either, are particularly happy, independent, or free,' Julie went on. 'Unsuspicious, I suppose, I must concede, as far as Madame Hero is concerned,' and she laughed not very pleasantly, her eyes fixed on Mellin's pale, expressionless face.

Later, as she went along with the Perowsky on her charitable way, she told her the whole history of the Sprudelheim combination. 'But the mother, so far as politics are concerned, is not in it,' she said, as she came to an end. 'I half suspect Mellin of a romantic passion for her. We shall see. As for the girl, she is a

little fool; but she is useful with regard to the money question, and might be made still more so, if one could trust to her discretion.'

'I am glad you have told me about them. I feel I ought to know all the women who are affiliated to our branch. One can do so much more when one knows the materials one has to work with.'

'Yes! By the way, we quite wore out the patience of the veiled prophetess. Did you notice that Mellin was almost obsequious in his manner to her? There must be something new on the horizon.'

'Mellin knows what he is about, my dear little Kerezoffska; but, forgive me, the service has already begun,' and the Countess signing to her coachman to stop, alighted nimbly, waving her hand to Julie as she slid beneath the heavy curtained door of the church of St. Nicholas.

Julie de Kerezoff, with a contemptuous smile upon her thin, straight lips, threw herself back in the carriage, which bore her swiftly on her solitary and unorthodox way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VEILED PROPHETESS.

Past the Erbsen Street and the Wosnesenk Street, past the Isaac Church with its great gilded dome, past the Isaac Bridge, and the statute of Peter the Great, with its inscription of sublime and arrogant simplicity: 'Catherine III. to Peter I.,' Julie Kerezoff went on her way, not exactly rejoicing.

Her way led her past the four Admiralty quarters to what is called the 'English Quay,' whence she crossed to the opposite bank, and thus gained the Quay of Wassily-Ostrow, on which island her home was situated.

The colossal sphinxes, brought from Egypt, and placed in front of the Academy of Arts on this superb promenade, suggested a train of thought to the energetic little lady which it may not be uninteresting to follow.

So long as she had been in an obscure quarter of the town—where Russian and Calmuck, Tartar, Cossack, Finnish and Jewish physiognomies, in endless different shades and varieties, tell of the mixed working population—it had been necessary that she should avail herself of her friend's carriage; for no Russian lady walks in St. Petersburg, unless it be upon the Quays; least of all a person who desires to escape observation. But, as she turned into the magnificent southern Perspective, she called to the coachman to stop, and hastily alighted. She stood for a moment looking about her like one who is at home in his own quarter of the town. Not that she wished to meet friends or neighbours; on the contrary, she desired if possible to avoid such, their probable questionings and possibly embarrassing comments.

St. Petersburg was enjoying one of those ninety-seven days of sunshine which chary Nature has assigned as her portion of annual solar brightness. The Neva had broken up late that year, and it was now the middle of May; but the few days of Russian spring could scarcely be said to have yet commenced.

The islands, with gardens, groves, avenues

and country-houses, afforded an almost fairy-like prospect in the low afternoon sunlight. The trees were thickening in branch and bud; a greyish-green line showed that vegetation would spring to light as by magic should the sun's rays be consistently warm and penetrating for a few consecutive days. The vast expanse of the shining Neva, the transparent beauty of its calm waters, the feathery, neutral-tinted vegetation of Petroffski, Christoffski, Wassily-Ostrow, Kammeni-Ostrow, Yelagin, and their distant brethren, hanging as it were 'twixt heaven and earth; the grand Perspective, the noble Admiralty buildings, the quays, the bridges, the gilded cupolas and copper domes of churches and palaces, the vastness and space, and, above all, the majestic calm which seemed to overlie the Imperial glories of the Neva city, inspired even the superficial Julie with a feeling of awe and reverential enthusiasm.

A proverb says that St. Petersburg is the pride of the Russian, but that Moscow lies next his heart. However that may be, St. Petersburg is typical of the autocratic will which conjured a mighty city out of a desolate swamp, untrodden of the foot of man, save by stray

Finland hunters haunting its gloomy morasses, or by solitary Tschoude fishers—sweeping the shallows with their nets, or patiently punting their primitive canoes through the channels of primeval watercourses—dark solitary figures on the brown plain; the distant horizon as yet unbroken by dome or tower; nature savage and silent, but for the cry of the bittern or the chattering of the crane; save for the whirr of wings, the flight of wild-fowl, or the flutter of feathers high in mid-air, as the stork steers southwards, clapping his beak with a weird and hollow rattle, in his pilgrimage through the dark and melancholy skies. A Campagna without its glories; a prairie without its fauna or its flora; a dismal swamp, mysterious, inscrutable, hereafter to be illumined by the sign-manual of one man's semi-civilised, semi-barbaric genius, and to bear his name thence forth for ever, throughout long ages to come.

There are benches for pedestrians on the quays, but it would never have occurred to Madame de Kerezoff to rest on one of the great circular stone seats. To linger or loiter was to run the risk of question and remark. How came she to be on foot, and alone? And if the Countess Perowsky had the *manie* of

church-going, why had she not sent her friend home in the carriage that was probably waiting outside the church doors for the thoughtless devotee?

The vast, beautiful city, with its shining waters and gilded temples, so silent in its expanse, was in harmony with the inscrutable sphinxes which had seen, unmoved, the glories of ancient dynasties pass away, and the procession of immemorial races disappear, and made no sign of sympathy with the sorrowful succession of humanity. The secrets of St. Petersburg or the enigmas of Egypt, it was all the same to their far-sighted, unseeing stone gaze—mystic, wonderful, which no man may divine.

'Who can she be? What is the truth about her?' Julie asked herself, as she recognised a curious affinity between the silence of the city, the individual of her thoughts, and the Egyptian guardians of the Academy of Arts.

It had been part of her business to call, on her way to the rendezvous with Mellin, at a great English mercantile house on the English quay, and now, on her road homeward, she had to deliver a sealed note from Mellin, probably

a receipt for the large sum of money entrusted to her care.

It need scarcely be said that Messrs. Hill, Hardcastle, and Simcox knew nothing of the nature of the business of which they were the unconscious agents. Far more difficult and delicate matters than these were arranged by the subtle-minded leaders of the party, and their unsuspicious tools never divined the improbabilities, which were skilfully made to assume an air of *vraisemblance.*

They called the lady of Julie Kerezoff's thoughts 'the veiled prophetess' in jest. Her very nationality was an enigma, though she herself made no mystery of it. Some declared that her nickname arose from the fact of her occasionally affecting the Spanish style in the shape of a mantilla of costly black lace, from the filmy folds of which a deep red or yellow rose peeped forth with bewitching coquetry.

Her name was Esther Rodostamos. She was an orphan. She was favourably viewed at Court, though no one knew exactly why. It was reported that her father, a Greek banker, had been the useful and faithful financial agent of past and present Sovereigns. Imperial difficulties and donations, largesses and loans, it

was said, had been Rodostamo's special care. But he had now been dead many years, and Esther never alluded gratuitously to his connection with the Imperial family. That her means were ample, her manner of life showed. She travelled much, but she spoke of St. Petersburg as 'home,' and declared herself to be 'a Russian of the Russians.' What this might mean was not quite clear. Her loyalty to the reigning dynasty could scarcely be suspected, much less impugned. She had received distinguished marks of personal favour from more than one Imperial personage.

'A Sclav of the Sclavs' she could not mean to designate herself. Her birth and parentage rendered that impossible, for reasons hereinafter to be seen.

Scandal had never touched her, and gossip, even in the country of *canards* and *potins*, had only meddled harmlessly with her name. Her life was spent in public privacy. She never denied herself to visitors. Her well-ordered, cheerful, and yet subdued domesticity, was distinctly edifying to those admitted to her intimacy. Her friends were wont to declare that they went away strengthened and refreshed after an hour passed in her modest,

homelike apartments, where books and flowers and pet animals showed something of the gentle mind of their mistress, and offered an *ensemble*, at once more intimate, more soothing, and more endearing than upholstery alone, how superb or correct soever, can compass.

So far, Julie had not sought the personal friendship of Esther Rodostamos, though she had met her in St. Petersburg society, and knew her to be affiliated to the circle of which she herself was a member. At Mellin's they met, and spoke, and parted, all without disguise; but on the more important occasions of an official gathering the men and women of the Association were alike so thickly masked, that it was impossible to recognise the identity of the different members. Their very voices, if not artificially disguised, were so changed by the mask and veil that it was next to impossible to detect the individuality of the speaker. On one or two of these occasions, a woman had risen, and, with a vehement enthusiasm, had combated certain views of the Society, speaking as one inspired, under the irresistible influence of impassioned conviction. She had passed from reprehension to scorn, from scorn to the tenderest pleadings, and, finally, had

paused, after a last appeal, which supplied the 'one touch of nature' that, if only it be manifest, unfailingly seals the kinship of humanity. Opposition had, for the time, been silenced.

Not even the President of the section to which Julie Kerezoff and the Countess Perowsky belonged was known to them. He, too, was completely masked and disguised. It would be quite possible for their president to be changed continually, and no one be any the wiser. Since all subordinates were sworn to absolute obedience and secrecy, it mattered little at whose hands the commands were dealt forth. The verdict once pronounced, each member being a mere instrument in the hands of the Society, neither appeal nor protest was possible.

Madame de Kerezoff suspected the eloquence of the masked lady to be fairly attributable to the mysterious Esther Rodostamos, and, her feminine curiosity being piqued, she resolved to watch her attentively on all future occasions, and by the inflection of her voice, the turn of her sentences, some familiar trick of speech, such as all unconsciously use, to identify her, and ascertain beyond doubt whether she were, indeed, the masked heroine of the oration.

Such an occasion had presented itself to-day.

But the 'veiled prophetess' (as yet the weather did not permit of the fanciful mantilla) in a prosaic English tailor-made costume, with hat to match, looking an everyday young woman enough, except that such beauty as hers is scarcely vouchsafed to everyday humanity, had not given her the opportunity she sought. With an air of reserved, yet graceful courtesy, she had bowed to the Countess Perowsky and her companion, drawing back to let them pass; then, with a friendly smile and familiar wave of the hand to Mellin, as much as to say '*Place aux dames!* My business can wait; attend first, my friend, to these great ladies,' had seated herself somewhat apart in the shadow, taking a book from her pocket, and apparently giving herself up to its intent perusal.

The Countess Perowsky had, after her usual graceful, winning fashion, endeavoured to include the stranger in their conversation; but, the amenities of the great lady responded to, Esther Rodostamos had again applied herself to her volume of poems.

Then, when they were leaving, Helena Perowska had approached her with a few cordial words.

'I hear wonderful things of you,' she said,

smiling; 'my poor people tell me of generous sympathy, of gifts, and of aid and counsel such as would put me to the blush could I feel anything but admiration for my coadjutor and rival.'

'I might return the compliment,' said Esther; 'but then, Countess, you would indeed blush; for the charm of charity such as yours lies in its modesty, in the fact that the right hand knows not what the left does, although I know full well how helpful are both those little hands to all in need.'

'Come and see me,' the Countess cried impulsively, evidently pleased, flattered, charmed, 'your approval delights me. I dare not offer myself to your acquaintance, for I am told in your house one meets only *âmes d'élite*, but we ought to see more of one another, we have so much in common. It would be a graceful act, a real kindness on your part, to come and see me, for although I live in a crowd I am much alone.' And her beautiful eyes looked deep into Esther's mysterious orbs.

'You almost encourage me to take you at your word,' she replied, simply.

'Do, do!' insisted the Countess, 'you will confer on me the greatest favour,' and she and

Julie, nodding farewell to Mellin at his desk, passed down the stairs.

'Why did you hang back? Why did you not respond?' Mellin asked. His tone expressed none of the reproach his words conveyed. 'She was very pressing, very cordial, and she meant it.'

'I should expect her to be doubly cordial, doubly considerate to *me*,' Esther replied. 'She is a Countess and I am not. Therefore she is bound to be all the more polite and considerate.'

'I thought you were above that sort of thing; in anyone else I should call it snobbishness,' Mellin answered, still in the same cold, expressionless manner, writing as he spoke.

'I am never above respect or self-respect, and there is nothing snobbish in that,' Esther answered. 'She must feel it to be, as she says, an advantage to know me, otherwise these are mere phrases. If it be no advantage, then it is clearly a disadvantage. It is not for me to appraise my own value; but it *is* for me to provide that everyone who knows me shall set a distinct value on my acquaintance. If she means anything more than passing politeness we shall have opportunities of meeting. If

nothing, she will thank me later on for my discretion, and like me all the better for sparing her embarrassment; and even you must confess that *that* is better than a mental reproach on her part, or that I should take the shibboleth of society for a solemn profession of esteem and faith.'

'As you like,' Mellin answered wearily; '*affaire de femme*! it seems to me your sex enjoys making life difficult. I know nothing of their caprices and refinements.'

But Esther did not take up the gauntlet. The business she had come upon, had yet to be transacted, and when that was done she rose to take her leave.

'You will hear from me before the month is out,' Mellin said. 'We live in anxious times, and I am warned to be specially careful, so that it will probably be at some new address; but you know the sign, and you will not leave St. Petersburg without hearing from me.'

'I am always at your service,' she answered; and added, putting out her hand, '*à l'Anglaise*! It always seems to me that one is pledged to loyalty by the pressure of palm to palm.'

'Good-bye,' Mellin said gloomily.

'Or rather—*au revoir*!' and she was gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

'LET THE STRICKEN DEER GO WEEP.'

We seem to have wandered far from our poor little passionate Bianca and her desolate mother, sitting heart-stricken amongst the shattered gods of her household. Far from prosaic every-day life in middle-class London, where the monotony of parallel porticoes, and the multiplication of uniform scrapers, suggests a dead level of fate, daily contradicted in the most conclusive manner by social revelations.

The poor we have always with us. Welcome or unwelcome, the perennial incubus abides. But often as the thoughtful pedestrian walks through streets and squares where wealth is the first consideration of being, he marvels at the inevitable and heart-rending histories which experience teaches him are being played out within those inexpressive portals. Those screens of stone and brick—whose glassy eyes, multi-

plied like the orbs of Argus, look out with peacock-pride devoid of 'speculation' on the passer by—may hide horrors even the most hideous.

A bank of flowers, a stained-glass allegory, screen the sacred interior from the merest passing curiosity, and, perhaps, conceal heart-breaking family trouble; but silently, surely, slowly, in mansion after mansion the unresting Fates are weaving the web of Destiny; and what we, in our haste, condemn as frivolity in the butterflies of fashion, may be but heroism in another form, nobly doing duty for the nonce in place of sackcloth and ashes; silent endurance donning the garb of idle folly; sublime self-sacrifice making believe that 'motley is the only wear.'

We have come in these later days to doubt, disbelieve, and discredit much that our forefathers and foremothers accepted with a simple and appreciative faith. A couple of generations ago the belted earl and the scornful lady, the glitter of courts, and the pageantry of jousts and tournaments were considered necessary adjuncts of poetry and chivalrous sentiment. Nowadays there is a run on humble heroines and self-made heroes, and a wide-spread in-

credulity as to the prevalence of the softer passions. The heart is not supposed to beat beneath a Worth-made gown or a Poole-inspired suit; and on the stage the emotion of young lovers not infrequently raises a horse-laugh.

Some of our latter-day prophets even go so far as to preach a pessimistic programme of gloomy tidings for the rich and cultured, who because rich and cultured are incapable of the most rudimentary of human virtues; whilst as optimistic apostles they proclaim the propaganda of a proximate good time coming for corduroy and fustian, wherein the monopoly of virtue dwelleth for evermore. The woes of the poor are great, but hopeful; for them there is a remedy; for them sympathy beats in noble breasts; for them there is balm in Gilead, for them a physician is there. Education, philanthropy, a higher standard, more books and less beer, emigration, the force of 'banded unions' in the cause that is just, the proud realisation of an independence that once seemed a dim and distant dream, or was not so much as dreamed—these, and such as these, are the heartening possibilities that make of every poor man's life a potential romance, depending upon himself, on his

earnestness of purpose and singleness of mind for realisation. And what but class-prejudice can deny that the more generous outlook has extended, and must increase the aggregate of human happiness?

With the rich—so called—things have a different outlook. They have, or had, in a modified degree, their riches. But they have not (or only partially and individually have) the old unconditional, picturesque sympathy and respect of their social inferiors.

They themselves are conscious of a sliding scale of measurement, of a 'slipping away' of things that once seemed firm as the rock, stable as the structure of the earth itself. For them there is less scope and less outlook; they are hampered by a thousand social prejudices, perplexities, parables, and pledges, and must needs remain passive, since activity, of the winning, dominant order, seems to have become the prerogative of men of another stamp and another class, men of tougher fibre, rougher build, less delicate susceptibilities. The old order changeth and giveth place to the new; and there is an almost passionate demand for truth and reality, for honest prose in place of ornamental poetry.

Even in Art, it is the homely, the every-day, the so-called 'prosaic' that triumphs. Peasant women walking in the twilight of the poppy-fields after the labours of the day. Fisher-women making and mending nets on the sea-shore. The Sabbath evening of toil, as seen in workhouse wards and almshouse porches; the rough faces, lined and seamed, of old naval and military pensioners. Ploughed fields, grey skies, low horizons, pollard trees bordering the familiar common of the tramp or gipsy, river-side scenes and a low-lying country, rural lanes; the every-day story of labour and rest, of toil and struggle, of seed-time and harvest, the life that is lived around us, humble, modest, even obscure, but such as we know it.

These, with their sentiment and inspiration drawn from the every-day history of countless thousands, are the scenes which our young artists, of preference, depict. Tragedy and blank verse, high art and heroics have gone out, and if Shakespeare no longer 'spells ruin' in London, country managers might tell us that in the provinces it is still synonymous with insolvency.

If to the rich be denied all picturesqueness, unless it be the qualified picturesqueness of

the fashion-book, or the follies of pseudo-æstheticism, how much less picturesque, suggestive, or inviting is the life just below that of the ostensibly opulent—the life of the great middle-class masses—above want, beyond care, and yet bound by all the petty traditions of a long inheritance of would-be 'gentility'! The mean ambitions, the vulgar aspirations, the coarse contempt and uncultured ridicule of those a step, or it may be several steps, lower in the social scale, hardening their hearts, snubbing their noses, and widening their mouths from generation to generation of prosperous shop-keeping, gig-driving, face-grinding, and money-grubbing progenitors, present an aggregate of complacent and unlovely ignorance, appalling to contemplate.

As we walk past houses such as those inhabited by Hero, by Mrs. Fitzgerald, and by the Hudsons, we are apt to give our imagination the rein, and their harmless inhabitants the go-by. Higher or lower, Fancy seeks its sphere; but not in the homes of the dull, decent unsympathetic, more or less moneyed, eminently respectable British middle class, with its dull selfishness and petty outlook.

And yet Hero, as we left her in her bare,

regulation drawing-room, might have posed for a Niobe lamenting the loss of her jealousy-slain offspring; or a Rachel refusing to be comforted, because her children were not. For the first time in her life she recognised the fact that it is in the nature of things the young should show ingratitude. 'She had not been ungrateful,' she told herself, in this hour of desolation; recognising, for the hundredth time, how much had gone out of her life with the sympathy of that now silent soul, to which, during long, troublous years, she had instinctively turned in every sorrow, and never turned in vain.

She was to leave things to Fitz.

But meanwhile a horrible uncertainty possessed her as to how far Bianca had, in truth, come under alien influences; how far she was pledged to the writer of that strange letter, the very brevity of which argued a certain familiarity, dispensing with all formalities; almost, it might be said, arguing an easy disregard of the recipient's feelings, and a calm indifference to them on the writer's part. She only recognised how grateful was the surrounding silence to her sorely exercised spirit, when she imagined the torrent of voluble abuse

that would rush from Mr. Owen's lips were he informed of the extraordinary raid upon the sacred privacy of domestic life, made by persons whose meddling he would regard as an outrage that only counter-insult could avenge.

So Hero sat behind her blank walls, the stone screen between herself and the street, the blank window-eyes blindly vacant, telling nothing to the thousands of passers-by, nor, for the matter of that, even to friends, though never so friendly, had such come her way. For the moment, at least, her *rôle* was a passive one. She must possess her soul in patience, and await the event.

With the instinct of some wounded animal she shrank thankfully into her solitude. 'The stricken deer' must 'go weep;' only 'The hart ungallèd' has the privilege of play, 'For 'some must watch and some must weep, Thus runs the world away.' Once, for a moment, her thoughts turned to Graham, but for a moment only.

A woman, unless she be entirely at one with her lover, is more reticent with him on certain nice points regarding family honour than with all the world besides. Graham must think absolutely well of Bianca. Graham,

whose standard was so high that he had whispered to her, with an apology for his fastidiousness, an avowal that of all womankind he had met in his wanderings to and fro on the face of the earth, her own perfect mother, with her large heart, far-seeing judgment, and gentle nature, had come nearest to his conception of what the ideal woman ought to be. Graham would have no understanding for the escapades of a young girl. Graham she would probably see now less than ever, her mother's abiding presence in the house no longer sanctioning his occasional appearance there.

But friends drift apart, and men are fickle, and fate unkind, Hero told herself in the depression of her first despair, declaring bitterly that henceforth her portion must be loneliness and unavailing regret, veiled by effort and industry, though it might, nay even eventually must and should be. Fortunately, Fitz was strong and self-assertive enough, she thought, to take matters, without much injury to himself, into his own hands; and on his loyalty, as on his merciful judgment and kindly tact, she could implicitly rely.

CHAPTER XX.

STROLLING PLAYERS.

MRS. FITZGERALD who, for some time previously, had been putting forth tentative efforts at a measure of conciliation which should not involve too great sacrifice of pride on her part, thought herself well served by the catastrophe that cast Bianca on her hospitality.

Life was somewhat dull with her. She did not see much of her son, and with even the scant intercourse circumstances afforded, she realised more fully each time he left her that her power and influence were on the wane. She had no authority either to restrain him or to oppose his will; she scarcely had the power, so imperturbable was his good temper, to annoy him. She could not make up her mind as to whether the 'Owen-worship' were an accomplished fact, or whether it might be but the vain chimera of her own jealous imagination. As with many

women of her age and character, her animosity was chiefly directed against the person whose individuality stood on the same level with her own. She had hated Mrs. Owen as a pretty woman, of whom the doctor always spoke with that latent smile of pleasurable appreciation which betrays a silent satisfaction in the agreeable object of the passing, it may be momentary, contemplation. She despised her as a 'papist,' benighted in worse than heathen idolatry; and it exasperated her to think a person 'of that sort' should have claims to the respect and admiration of her acquaintance. Beauty, grace, intelligence and worth she comprehensively denied poor Léonie, who, on her part, had never understood, and perhaps not greatly concerned herself, as to the reasons of her sister-in-law's dislike. Of Hero, Mrs. Fitzgerald knew very little, and that little she perverted to suit her own purposes; but even Hero she was prepared to tolerate (rivalry not obtaining in that direction), and Bianca, if Bianca would forego all claims on her son's attention, Mrs. Fitzgerald told herself, she was almost capable of loving.

Fitz stood just halfway between Bianca and her mother: eight years younger than the one

and eight years older than the other, and had he chosen to woo and wed the elder lady, no one could have wondered at his taste; whereas, if he were content to wait for the daughter, his patience and prevision could not be blamed.

Bianca was already wearying of the Hudsons when her waning visit came to a hurried close. Timid old Mrs. Hudson was relieved to know that the young lady's face was turned homewards. With her old-fashioned notions she thought Bianca a vast deal too independent; she disapproved of her foreign correspondence and flighty ways; she was offended with the girl for snubbing her son, who was to her a Prince Charming, a Lord Paramount, endowed with every virtue a woman could admire or desire. The old lady's instincts guided her, as old ladies' instincts not infrequently do, to the altogether unreasonable surprise of their juniors, to general conclusions of a sufficiently accurate character, and she determined to keep her eyes open and to act in accordance with the observations coming within her orbit of mental vision.

As for young Hopeful, he only laughed good-humouredly at his mother's prudent previsions, and bore no malice to Bianca; but his moon-

calf love was evidently in the fourth quarter, and he was peering over the hurdles in anticipation of 'fresh woods and pastures new.'

'A fellow ought not to pass life kicking his heels together amongst a lot of old women,' he had significantly said, as he and Fitz came upon Mrs. Hudson's afternoon tea-table, where the rector, the curate, and an active parish spinster were imbibing the cheering cup, and enjoying the mild excitement of plum cake, and the 'cackle of the bourg' combined. 'I am too old for the army, unless I get in through the militia; or I might join an exploring party to South Africa; or——'

To this Fitz had assented, sympathy being all that was, momentarily, required of him.

As for Bianca, despite her natural grief and panic-terror, she was secretly glad that the order of release had sounded; and something of excitement and anticipation mixed with her more creditable feelings, when she found her next destination to be Portland Place, and Mrs. Fitzgerald's hospitality her immediate fate.

Mrs. Owen's death had so far lifted them all out of the everyday commonplace that there was a touch of tenderness even in her

great-aunt's voice as she folded Bianca in her arms, and murmured a few words of condolence and welcome to the sobbing girl. The exaggeration and helplessness of her undisciplined grief and terror appealed to Mrs. Fitzgerald's better feelings; and when, regardless of her best cap, her aunt stood awaiting the travellers in the hall, the wind blowing her streamers wildly about her head, and the rain darting arrows on to the oil-cloth and ruining the rug, Fitz augured well for Bianca's reception.

'Nothing could have been better,' he thought, when, two hours later, he found the ladies in the smaller drawing-room, Bianca nestled close up against his mother's side, the warm firelight playing across her pale face and white hands, and Mrs. Fitzgerald pretending to follow her usual routine by holding knitting-pins and wool, but in reality absorbed in Bianca's answers to the questions her aunt thought it no harm to put to her.

A momentary impatience with her son for so stupidly interrupting the conversation, gave a tinge of acrimony to Mrs. Fitzgerald's recognition of his entrance, whilst her brow involuntarily lowered as Bianca, raising her head from

the black silk shoulder whereon, in her subdued mood, she had confidingly inclined it, exclaimed with all her wonted animation (by comparison with her mourning mood it erred on the side of excess): 'O Fitz! what a time you have been! I thought you were *never* coming!'

'I knew my mother would like to have you all to herself, to pet and caress for a bit; and you know the proverbial "two's company," &c. &c.'

'You and I were company all the way up to town, all through the time,' Bianca answered, with no thought of flirtation, but only gratefully remembering the young man's brotherly kindliness, and mentally appreciating the fact that, whomsoever the 'third' unwelcome entity the social proverb might point at, it must not be the faithful Fitz.

'Perhaps I am *de trop*,' Mrs. Fitzgerald, in a stilted voice of awful portent, here interjected; 'but if so, you will have to put up with me for the present.'

'Nonsense, mother! you will frighten Bianca; how can you be "*de trop*" in your own house? Why, you know it's your duty to be here. I cannot chaperone a young

lady, and should only blunder if I attempted it.'

'Yes, aunt,' Bianca said, caressingly laying her own soft, white hand on her aunt's grim claw; 'of course you have to take care of me. Fitz is quite right for once in a way, for he's always making blunders. Only,' she added, after a pause, softening, 'one must be just, you know—he did not make any blunder in the train, or—or—afterwards.'

Didn't he? He had nevertheless kissed her in the train; held her little tear-swollen face tenderly to his breast; smoothed her pretty, aching head with fond, protective palm. And under cover of the dusk Fitz smiled.

'Perhaps it's the mother after all,' Mrs. Fitzgerald was saying to herself. 'Very young men always do prefer older women. He talks quite paternally of the duty of looking after the child. To-morrow I shall tell her not to be so pert, and that it is unbecoming for her to speak of his blunders.'

'Poor old Fitz!' thought Bianca. 'I ought to take his part though he is rather a bore, and I dare say a born tyrant, but I am sure he meant to be kind to-day.'

Thus our idlest words strike different notes,

suggesting divergent trains of thought to the hearers; each one going his own way, which, did he but know it, leads him far enough from the speaker's mark.

But familiarity, if it do not necessarily 'breed contempt,' does breed an easiness, a *sans-gêne* amongst housemates, where, if self-restraint and observant consideration of others be not the abiding rules, the fret and jar that mars the harmony of so many families soon endangers a comprehensive peace.

Bianca had little of the conventional respect for her elders that ladies of Mrs. Fitzgerald's type exact in their severer moments. Her mother she habitually treated as an equal, as a sister; an elder sister perhaps, whose greater experience she was obliged to recognise and willing to admit, but whose will, tamed by the world, by life, by years, by affectionate aspirations after Bianca's happiness, must for the greater part be secondary, and subordinate to that of her child. To her grandfather she was, on the whole, an indulgent companion, jesting with him on terms of easy equality in her amiable moments, and pouting and sulking openly with him when the familiar 'G. P.' gave place to 'my grandfather,' or

'*mon grand-père.*' Of Mrs. Owen she had indeed stood in some awe. And a thrill that was half exultation, half remorse, ran through the girl's undisciplined heart as she remembered the calm, clear, searching eyes, for ever closed, the keen, temperate, far-sighted previsions of wisdom darkened and silenced for evermore. Thus, when to the decency of a becoming grief due sacrifice had been made, the new order of things developed itself with amazing rapidity.

No sooner had Bianca felt herself free and unobserved than she had written, dashing off letters by the dozen, sending her new address to her friends in Russia and elsewhere.

The first text for a sermon that Mrs. Fitzgerald's lips tingled to preach lay in Bianca's foreign correspondents. And it is only fair to say that good feeling had multiplied these missives almost beyond reason, and to letters concerning 'the Cause' were added letters of condolence, letters recommending Bianca to take care of herself, of '*notre petite Blanchette*,' of '*sa belle, son adorable mère*,' of '*ma petite biche Blanche*,' as Julie caressingly called her; for Julie, in whom, to her credit be it spoken, family affection was strong,

pictured Bianca staining her fair young beauty, and suffering sorrow to prey on her ardent young soul until, by sheer fretting over the irrevocable, she made herself seriously ill.

Bianca rode on high seas of contentment not to say excitement, and even forgot that she had to feign a sorrow, as Hamlet says, even if she felt it not.

'In my young days,' Mrs. Fitzgerald began at the breakfast-table one morning, no longer able to control herself, 'young ladies were not allowed to receive letters and answer them in the way that seems to be the fashion of the present day. Young women had no time for scribbling.'

'The penny post wasn't invented then, aunt.'

'Penny post, indeed! I don't pretend to understand such things, but letters with Swiss and Russian and German postmarks on them can't have much to do with the penny post. But, apart from the shameful waste of money and waste of time, the principle of the thing is indefensible. When I was a young woman——'

'But that's ages ago; everything's changed since then, aunt.'

'Don't be impertinent, Miss.'

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'Why did you say it was "shameful" of me to waste money? It's my own money, and I might "waste" it much worse, as, indeed, I see people doing every day.'

'Do you mean me? You are an impertinent, badly brought up, insolent, ungrateful girl; you ridicule my age.'

'I never did. I said it was a long time ago; but I never said that was your fault. That is only "a matter of fact," as Fitz says.'

'So Fitz has been talking against his mother to you? Very well. I shall know what to expect next!'

'He never did. Fitz, can't you say you never did, and say that I never said so?'

'My poor Bianca, it seems to me you have said too much already. I wish you would speak more respectfully to my mother.'

'Why did she say I was impertinent? I had not been impertinent then; and it's not my fault if I'm impertinent now. What right has aunt to say I'm badly brought up? Isn't that talking against mamma — and — and against grandmam—m—m—a?' beginning in her passion to sob violently.

'I do not think, Bianca, that your mother would approve of your tone.'

'There!' Mrs. Fitzgerald cried, triumphantly; 'you see! Pampered and spoiled though you are, even Fitz believes your mother would not approve of your insolence to me; even he, ridiculous as he is, flattering your vanity until you don't know yourself—even he can see how you treat me.'

'You called me insolent and ungrateful!' and Bianca continued to sob, more with anger than with grief.

'So I did; and so you are; *most* insolent, and *most* ungrateful.'

'Mother! she doesn't mean it, she is only a child; show a little indulgence.'

'Oh, very well; go against your mother, Fitz!' and tearing out a handkerchief, the size of a small table-cloth, Mrs. Fitzgerald kept dabbing it against her dry and fiery little eyes, whilst her shrill voice came intermittently forth from behind its voluminous folds in accents of stifled lament and exasperation.

'You called me insolent and impertinent,' Bianca went on, returning to the charge. She, too, was sobbing and shrilling, until Fitz fairly shuddered at the feminine discord. 'I was not impertinent or insolent until you made me so, by speaking against mamma; but

if I am impertinent it's my own fault, not hers; and you said I was ungrateful.'

'So you are. Most ungrateful, Miss!'

'How can I be ungrateful? I am not ungrateful.'

'You mistook my mother, Bianca. This is really all very bad.'

'That's right, take her part; go on,' and sobs burst forth from behind the folds of linen.

'You stupid old woman!' shouted Bianca, utterly forgetting herself, and losing all control over her words as she jumped up. 'Can't you see he's been taking your part all the time?'

For a moment both mother and son were absolutely scared into silence, but Bianca, far beyond noticing them or their looks, rushed forward on her fate like one possessed. 'You call me ungrateful,' she shouted; 'I say I'm not. Not because I'm good; but simply because no one can be ungrateful where there's nothing to be grateful for.'

'Hear her! Listen to her!' shrieked the outraged lady from behind her sheet.

'Bianca, you forget yourself!' Fitz said, in a stern quiet voice, inexpressibly shocked at the sight of the beautiful fury in whom a demon was dominant that no present power could lay.

'You will be sorry for this; you had better go to your room, I will speak to you presently.'

'Yes!' the girl cried, 'I *will* go to my room, which I am sorry I ever entered or so much as saw, and where I will not stay a second after I have packed my box. What I forget, or leave behind, you can burn or throw out of window; and when you have got rid of me and purged the place of my presence, although you will have all the honour and glory of having hospitably turned me out, I shall be at this advantage, that I shall have no special cause for *gratitude*!' And with a flaming spot on either cheek she confronted her enemies like a stag at bay; then, tossing her head and snuffing the air, she stalked defiantly out of the room, trembling in every limb, but pleased to think that she had maintained her ground.

Poor, misguided, foolish, passionate young thing! Had she asked to be born into the world with this wild spirit, ready, like tinder, to take fire at a spark? Was it her fault that the hot Italian blood in her veins coursed through them so rapidly that it outstripped all thought, all reason, all fear of consequences? That her words, like torrents of burning lava,

rushed over every obstacle, leaving ruin and devastation behind?

Fitz, shocked, grieved, disillusioned, disenchanted, felt an immense pity rising up in his heart for this poor passionate child, whose very nature pledged her to suffering.

'Well,' Mrs. Fitzgerald began, throwing down the towel of eclipse as Bianca, having reached the door, flew out of the room and up the stairs, 'I wish you joy of the bargain! Did you see how she shouted at me, how she glared defiance at me, as she left the room?'

It was in Fitz's mind that his mother must be possessed of second sight, thus miraculously to have pierced the screen of household linen concealing her countenance; but this was no moment for discussing natural phenomena, so he contented himself with saying:—

'No one could excuse such conduct, mother; I, least of all. But I trust to your generosity, later on, to forgive it.'

'Then you trust, let me tell you, to a broken reed,' Mrs. Fitzgerald replied, with spirit and dignity. 'She has gone too far this time.'

Well might Fitz take upon himself, after

repeated scenes of which this was but a sample, the first instalment as it were of a series, to call privately on Hero, and ask her 'When Bianca was to go home?' The girl and his mother lived in a state of high wrangle, which seemed to have peculiar attractions of its own to both these combative natures. Bianca's character, he felt, must deteriorate in such an atmosphere; and if a certain grotesque affection (as of two pugilists who 'don't want to fight,' but to whom fighting is fate-appointed destiny), seemed able to subsist, the shock of mortal combat notwithstanding, side by side with pugnacity, it could only be at the cost to both of mutual esteem, regard, and self-respect.

Both Mrs. Fitzgerald and Bianca, by some sort of grim intuition, understanding or sympathy, felt that the fascinating fights which lent such piquancy to their intercourse must be carried on in Fitz's absence. They were, therefore, polite to one another under protest in his presence; a sort of armed neutrality obtained; and it not seldom fell out that, in acting the amiable, Bianca forgot her sulks and Mrs. Fitzgerald her offended dignity; and thus, in spite of themselves, they grew temporarily into the

best of friends and most congenial of companions again. Not that the rose-coloured phase prevailed for long. A look amiss in Bianca, a harsh word from the aunt, and hey! presto! pass! they were at it, 'hammer and tongs,' once more.

On the occasion of Bianca's first skirmish and subsequent retreat, she had flown upstairs, torn open her drawers, and dashed her belongings into her little trunk. Its dimensions required skilful and patient packing, and everything had to be pulled out, to be rammed in again, stamped upon, pummelled, trampled down. Too proud to ring for help, or expose her discomfiture, Bianca jumped on her box, and performed a frantic war dance on the lid, which broke the hasps, and put locking out of the question. A man was fetched to look at the mischief; he said the trunk must be carried away for effectual repairs, and thus there was no choice for Bianca but to remain in her room, invoking the locksmith with impatient adjurations and objurgations. The luncheon-bell rang; she would not go down. A housemaid was sent to call her; she had a headache and wanted no lunch. A tray was brought up. What! eat of this inimical bread and inhospi-

table salt? Never! Avaunt! base hireling maid, false loaf and faithless butter, rather starvation! But when, after hours of sobbing and sulking, Bianca finally fell asleep on her bed, beaten by fatigue and want of food, it was evident the broken lock, insignificant agent of the adverse gods, controlled her fate, and she would not leave Portland Place that day.

Already, with the one idea in her mind that it was her duty, pending initiation to higher mysteries and deeper responsibilities, to gain adherents, or at least contributors to 'the Cause,' Bianca had determined that certain social advantages should be turned by her to the best account.

None but ladies of gentle birth and refined breeding came to Hero's house; and of these the greater part had, again and again, pressed both mother and daughter to come to them, as they themselves chose—only to come. But Hero had as steadily refused. In her own house she felt herself the equal, and, if they would have it so, the friend of anybody deserving her friendship; but the position was other so soon as she crossed her own threshold. As a 'professional' she would not go; as a

'friend' the inequalities of fortune made her friendship a thing to be sought rather than to be offered, and she felt that Bianca's was not a spirit to accept or brook rebuff or slight, how small soever might be the solecism, thoughtlessly it might be, or carelessly committed. Then again, with Bianca's ardent nature, she might yearn for the glitter and gaiety, the tinsel and frippery of 'society,' so called. Seen near, and accepted as a matter of course, it might soon become necessary to her gaiety, good humour, and contentment; whereas the unknown could be stoically avoided, with a good-natured laugh at fashionable follies, a tolerant contempt for the vacant superfluities of idleness and wealth.

Wealth! This was the one certain thing about their visitors. Whatever else they might be or were not, wealthy they certainly were. Bianca did not realise how few young girls of position have money in their purses, or at their own disposal. A few shillings for pocket-money is all they know of the great medium; everything is bought for them, provided, and arranged by their mothers, out of whose hands, for the most part, they pass as ignorant of the value of money, of the relative meaning of

£ *s. d.*, as if the whole machinery of life did not turn upon a metal pivot, and household happiness depend greatly upon the administrative faculty.

In her ignorance Bianca imagined herself making friends with girls of her own age in a mild and guarded way, proselytising in their ranks, interesting them in wonderful things, to which she would give no name, creating enthusiasms that should be palpably productive of more than mere froth and excitement, as Mellin had once severely said to her regarding her own attitude. And with these ambitions working in her mind she let fall something of her aspirations during one of those friendlier moods, when an armistice gave the combatants breathing-time to recruit before recommencing hostilities.

Mrs. Fitzgerald would have been shocked had you told her so (as would many good and excellent persons in like case, were their condition of mind to be put into plain words), but to scent out disunion, to guess at disharmony, to promote friction where smoothness should prevail, was to her pleasure beyond words. Thus, when Bianca complained of the dulness of her life, her aunt advised her to take advantage of

the situation, and urge her mother to accept the invitations so freely given. She had learned that Bianca would suffer no direct attack upon her mother, and that whilst the thing might be condemned, the person must be spared. Just now it suited her to respect this weakness, and thus Hero's name had been left, so far, pretty well out of the discussion.

'I don't see that girls should be mewed up in their own families,' said her aunt; 'and when you are in second mourning I should, if I were you, insist upon going out. How are you ever to get married if you don't go out?'

'I don't know about that,' Bianca answered, not liking the allusion to her marriage, but still placable.

'As to the reasons you give about "home-keeping hearts being happiest,"' Mrs. Fitzgerald continued, 'they are simply ridiculous, although they are your mother's. A woman who, when you were little more than a baby, and she herself scarcely more than a raw girl, could go play-acting all alone, up and down the world, with no husband, father, or brother to protect her, for such a woman to talk of the sanctity of family life, and the sacredness of home ties, is too much of a farce!'

'Of course,' Bianca assented, innocently, believing these to be general propositions.

'Why, of course! for what's an old woman in her dotage, dragged at the chariot-wheels of a wilful, headstrong person, who believes herself to be a beauty, and who, of course, would do as she liked in spite of fifty mothers?'

As Bianca did not recognise this fancy portrait of her mother and grandmother, she remained silent, waiting for her aunt to return to the text of her own prospective revolt.

'And so I should say, if I were you,' Mrs. Fitzgerald continued, thinking, with malicious satisfaction, of Hero's ears tingling at the bad, bitter words coming to her at second-hand by her daughter's mouth.

'It would be no good saying that; mamma would not understand it. Besides, it's stupid, and does not bear on the point at issue between us,' Bianca replied sententiously, as being on her best behaviour.

'Won't understand it? Stupid? She will understand it fast enough; and let me tell you, Bianca, that if any one is "stupid" it is not, as you politely insinuate, I; nor, in the sense you imagine, your mother; but you, yourself. You would only expose your ignorance of your own

affairs, and make a fool of yourself if you were to say such things as you have said to me amongst your fine friends who know your history. And I blame your mother for giving you the independence of a woman whilst she tries to tie you to her apron-strings and to keep you as ignorant as a child. Look here! Your mother could not agree with the husband she, and that silly old woman, her mother, had persisted in taking, and she ran away from him and lived the life of a strolling player up and down Europe. Your grandfather was much too busy with his own affairs to interfere with the freaks of two silly women, and it was only when your father died that she retired into private life—when it ceased to be a scandal. If you didn't know all this you ought to have known it; and as it had to come out, sooner or later, sooner is better——'

'It's false!' cried Bianca, white with fury.

She really believed the whole story to be a fabrication invented to wound and humiliate her.

'How dare you, Miss! It's true. What interest have I in befouling my own nest?'

'Nest? Yours?' repeated the girl fiercely, staring at her aunt.

'Don't you belong to me? Though I always denied it, and said my niece's name was Towers, for I wouldn't own a pack of strolling mountebanks; and do you think it a very pleasant thing for me to know my son had joined the party and showed himself in public with them?'

'I don't believe a word of it,' Bianca cried, furious but still incredulous. 'Buffoons? Mountebanks? Why the people we knew abroad were a hundred times better than you are! I shall ask Fitz.'

This was not what Mrs. Fitzgerald wanted.

'I would advise you not to,' she said.

'But I shall! I shall ask him directly he comes. Fitz always speaks the truth.'

'Ask me what, Bianca?' for Fitz, coming up the stairs, and pausing on the rug, had heard his cousin's voice raised in altercation, and had judged it wiser to look in *en passant*, lest haply his calmer judgment might soothe the discordant spirits within. 'Rely on my telling you anything I can.'

'She says that we are shameful people: vagabonds, strolling-players, vagrants, buffoons, and that mamma's life was a scandal, and that she never owned us, but said she only had a

niece called Towers; and that we left debt and disgrace behind us in every capital in Europe; and that I ought to be grateful she has recognised me; and that you knew it, and were disgraced by us, and your position nearly ruined; and that I was the laughing-stock of people who knew what we really were; and that that was the reason I ought to have been grateful when she took me up!' and tearless, crimson-cheeked, declamatory Bianca stood up before her cousin with flaming eyes.

'Mother, is this true?'

'She knows it is true; how could I have invented it? I did not believe her at first,' cried Bianca in reply.

'Or is Bianca mistaken?' Fitz asked, disregarding the interruption, though struck by the cogency of the argument.

'It's impossible to talk to a person in that condition. The girl is simply beside herself.'

'But, mother, say a word to soothe her; if it is not true, if she has mistaken you, she will be sorry presently.'

'Soothe me! She has killed me; she has stabbed me to the heart; she has made me wretched for life; she has made me miserable for ever. How can you talk of "soothing" me,

Fitz?' and the poor misguided child burst into a passion of tears. 'Why didn't mamma tell me herself? Oh, why was I kept in the dark?' she wailed.

'Poor Hero!'

It was Fitz who spoke.

'Yes! you pity everyone but me!'

'I pity you, too, my poor child; but you go too far. I cannot do you the wrong of pitying you for the fancies of an over-excited imagination. That would be no kindness.'

'And all the time you have been despising me, and looking down upon us,' she sobbed.

'I have never despised you, never looked down upon you. Your mother and your grandmother I reverence with all my heart. Do not let their names be dragged into this unholy strife!'

'Always them! always others!'

To this cry of jealousy Fitz made no answer. A month ago it would have thrilled his being with joy; but his dreams were dissolving day by day with mournful rapidity.

'"My poor child!"' Mrs. Fitzgerald repeated to herself. 'Then it's the mother after all. "My poor Hero!" or didn't he say "*my?*"

He "reverences" her mother and her grandmother. Of course! his own mother counts for nothing!' and without an audible word to either culprit, Mrs. Fitzgerald rose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

REBELLION.

Bianca's mind was in a tumult. All was darkness and confusion. She would never go home. She would go into a convent. She would run away. She would write to Julie. She would join the propaganda, and, as the humblest slave, the last menial, the nameless, homeless, necessary tool, she would work out for herself some kind of destiny, some kind of salvation. Her mother she would not forgive. All the gentler feelings that had bloomed on the newly-made grave were withered, torn down, rooted up, so that their place knew them no more. Her better angel was exorcised to make room for the evil spirit of her choice and preference raging within. So they had had their secrets, though she might have none! They had their story and their mystery, though they forbade all reticence to her. Her mother, who shrank

from publicity as though it were a crime, a shame, a sin, had stood nightly upon the public stage, ruthlessly eyed and boldly criticised of thousands, and the years of her liberty had been accomplished. For herself, too, Bianca thought, in her unreasoning, irrational, rebellious rage, that for her, too, privacy and the narrowness of a petty life might be no hardship after years of freedom, action, fame! But *she* was to be kept in ignorance and leading-strings; she was to be tamed, and chained, and driven; and not to say, not even to think, that her soul was her own, the unwilling instrument of a rebellious obedience.

If it had been hard to stand the cribbing, cabining, and confinement when it arose, as she thought, from a want of sympathy, from timidity, from what—had she known the word—Bianca would have stigmatised as Philistinism and respectability-worship, how much harder now when she discovered that her own mother had passed through the ordeal, had enjoyed (alas! poor Hero!) years of independent action, and now selfishly wished to deny her child, not a like liberty (for, until now, Bianca had never dreamed of a public career, of the freedom of a life outside the family), but a wider social

sphere, an extended field of experience and action? Now, for the first time, she remembered that, although not possessed of her mother's remarkable gifts of voice and ear, she had a fair musical talent. She recalled all that she had heard, when her mother, labouring conscientiously, had put her whole intelligence into the instruction she was giving her pupils; and she now saw that in the comparative indifference which Hero had shown in the matter of Bianca's own musical education, there had been something more and other than the mere weariness of one who, toiling all day in her special vocation, was glad when the hour of rest came to wrap her talent, and see those around wrap all and any similar gifts, in the napkin of oblivion, seeking refreshment in other and different pursuits.

Bianca never doubted, in her first stormy excitement, but that a little practice was all that was required to turn her out a finished singer. Her heart beat as she thought of the immense sums earned easily by professional favourites, and her dazzled and delighted imagination pictured a future wherein, no longer an obscure tool, a humble nonentity, a dull little girl, snubbed by her relations, but a

brilliant success, a social star of the first magnitude, she would pour the wages of her toil at Mellin's feet, glad so to be spent if only she might serve 'the Cause' with lavish expense of purse and spirit.

When, later on the day of her memorable outbreak, Fitz asked her to come to him in the library, although her excitement had partly subsided, she was still utterly impracticable. It was in vain that he even went so far as to say he was sure his mother had had no idea of the mischief her idle words were calculated to work; in vain that he tried to explain to Bianca that the whole had been a gross exaggeration, founded on hearsay, on prejudice, on jealousy. That her mother had never been on the stage; that what she had done had been done for Bianca's own sake alone, in order that she might be brought up as a modest, gentle, beloved girl, in the sweet and safe atmosphere of a peaceful and plentiful home.

Bianca would not listen. 'I do not care for the details,' she said. 'Theatre, or concert room, opera house, or music hall, it's all the same to me. To be seen of hundreds, hooted by thousands, or applauded by tens, it does not really alter all that I care about, all that I dwell

upon, or want to know. Why was it kept a secret from me?'

'For your own sake, Bianca.'

'So that I might hear it from strangers, be taunted with it by enemies! Not that I harbour any ill-will against your mother; you can tell her so. Perhaps she is right, perhaps we *have* disgraced you all, injured your position and reputation; I don't know. Oxford dons and opera singers don't seem to have much in common——'

'Bianca, how can you, how dare you, how have you the heart to speak in such a way? I saw your mother but now, and—I—my——'

'My heart aches for her,' Fitz was going to say; but the utter hopelessness of trying to find in Bianca the little home-bird, the fledgling of the family nest, the one ewe lamb of the household, was too apparent for any appeal. When the angry girl had proclaimed her rebellion, and thrown over all authority, of what use—but to expose the cause he advocated to ignominious defeat—to call her to account for her secrecy of action, or to demand an explanation of the strangely familiar brevity of the letter he even now felt crackling in his breast pocket?

With his mother Fitz was seriously displeased, and consequently on a footing of extreme coldness. He felt persuaded that her intention had been mischievous, and — the mischief done—no great good could result from dwelling on motives, even had he been able to believe her motives blameless.

Thus, he, who had hoped to go a joyous gospeller, with glad tidings of Bianca's affectionate confession and submission, to the unhappy Hero, had to play the part of a hypocrite, and deliberately predict peace where there was neither present peace nor any prospect of it.

Mistakes enough had already been made, or so it seemed to him ; further blundering, either through want of tact or too precipitate attempts at explanation or reconciliation, would be little less than crime. If blunders must be, they should not, he thought, be of his initiative.

Much as he might think of and feel for Hero, pity was not unnaturally mixed in his mind with a certain amount of blame.

Looking upon his cousin as endowed with the promise of all that is most excellent in woman, he had in secret nursed the fond hope that the coming years contained a possible

harvest of happinesses, all the more attractive from the unhomelike life offered to him by his mother's house.

Bianca's extreme youth was no bar to the romantic worship he was prepared to offer at her shrine; and when he pictured her to himself as his divinity, it was not the half-child, half-romp, and wholly thoughtless girl she had hitherto been, but as a nymph slender and stately—as a smiling self-possessed blossom of womanhood, gracious of mien, virgin of soul, whose shining zone, clasped above a heart as pure as the white raiment falling in spotless folds to her feet—any modern lover might deem it a glory to bind, like Greek poets and lovers of old, as a fillet round the brow.

To Fitz, familiar as he was with his mother's foolish and jealous allusions, it seemed impossible that anyone could suspect him of ever having looked on Hero with other eyes than those of brotherly affection. There had been no confusion of sentiment or unhealthiness of feeling in his mind. Such a mother as Hero, with a mother like Mrs. Owen had been, must needs possess the daughter of his imagination. To him Hero was wife, matron, widow, but whilst he honoured her for her courage and uncom-

plaining industry, his theories of life were all at variance with the possibilities his mother's jealous imagination had from time to time conjured up. He wanted not only a virgin love, he wanted a child-Love, into whose heart no transient fancy should have so much as glanced in passing; he wanted to be father, brother, lover, husband, to his girl-wife, whose memories should all be shared by him, and to whose childish troubles and girlish grief it had in some sort been his to play the part of a humble providence.

And this was the result!

As he looked back over the few weeks last past, he wondered at the rapidity with which his illusions had been dispelled. Hope, as he had understood it, when he had seen Bianca a welcome guest under his mother's roof, had taken affrighted wings to itself and fled. What had he to hope for now? No man in his senses could wish to marry a beautiful fury, or believe that that may lay happiness.

And Fitz was nothing if not sensible. It seemed to him that Bianca was no longer the creature of his dreams, but a turbulent stranger. A person of disposition so antagonistic to his own, and to the being of his desire, that

repulsion rather than attraction must, he believed, be the inevitable result of further intercourse. He could see, in his disillusionment, that which not even the most anxious maternal previsions had inspired Hero to perceive, namely, that the girl was what she was rather by accident of birth, rather by inheritance of idiosyncrasies, rather by endowment of race, than of any innate perversity of will, any inherent fault of personal predilection.

How differently we should often judge the actions of others, in all their inexplicability, in all their disappointing eccentricity and perverseness, if fuller information enabled us to touch the matter with the point of the needle; if the story of some inherited tendency, some alien strain, some legacy of moral warp, could show us the real root of the irresponsible action which we in our ignorance only blame or deplore.

But Fitz saw that the passionate rebellion of the southern nature, which sent the hot Italian blood coursing through Bianca's veins in irrational revolt, was not a thing likely to be corrected by mere words. Something also of the Celtic inconsequence of Mr. Owen's volatile and irreflective character the malevolent fairy

godmother had bestowed; and it was a question with him how far the girl was to be blamed for a combination which she certainly could not help, and had not chosen.

One thing was certain, his idol was shattered. Bianca could not possibly develop into the picture of his imagination. Either she would go forward on her own wilful way, and evolution would produce a beautiful undisciplined virago, unfit to be the head of any good man's household or the mother of his children; or she must be morally uprooted, plucked up by some stronger hand than his, and transplanted into other soil.

What Bianca was, she had been all along, despite the treacherous surface of calm. Shelter, rest, privacy had been abhorrent to her; she longed to use her wings in short trial flights to soar away, to breathe a fresher air, to shake off the jesses, and to gain strength of flight and clearness of vision from her independent bird's-eye view.

CHAPTER XXII.

LORD GEORGE PEVERIL.

St. Petersburg lay, smiling up in brilliant beauty to a cloudless sky.

Like the fabled sleeping princess, the city of the Neva had dreamed away long months in silence beneath the snow-shroud of the northern winter. The ice-bound blood, chilled into a semblance of death, the great heart pulsing feebly beneath the merciless iron grip, told of life failing and faltering. In the great centres, on the quays and Perspectives, evidences of vitality might yet be seen; the arteries, the smaller canals and populous suburbs, traversed by long streets, showed the circulation of the human stream, faint, slow, and languid so long as the snowy winding-sheet still shrouded, and the icy fetters still bound the great city, prostrate beneath the monotonous silence of a grey sky.

But, at the magic touch of Nature, long delayed, the sleeping beauty threw off her mantle of white fur, opened her closed eyes, unloosened her locked lips, and drawing a deep inspiration of new life, new hope, new youth, new loveliness, offered her smiling face frankly to the warm kisses of the radiant sun-god.

Spring, a lovely, tender, hopeful season everywhere, means at St. Petersburg enchantment, rapture, intoxication. There is no delaying, 'as The tender ash delays to clothe herself in green.' There comes a night when the children of the soil feel a throb in the air, a tingling in the blood, a rustle of wings as they raise their heads from their pillows, and the early dawn brings the consciousness that the great change is accomplished, that the birds are once more with them in thousands, that the sap driven upwards through the trees is bursting the buds into rich promise of beauty, that the air is vocal with a thousand familiar sounds, fragrant with a thousand familiar scents, teeming with life in every form, multiplying the seen and unseen myriads.

During these days of early summer (for there is nothing in the Russian spring of the caprice and deceitfulness that we associate

with that season) the population of St. Petersburg is as though possessed. The Italian loves the large horizons and the liberal suns of the sunny south; the Spaniard revels in the sensuous animal delight that recalls to the northerner an image of the contentment of the lizard basking and winking in the blazing heat of a sun-baked wall or a cat reposing on a sunny window-sill; but the Russian, whose calendar shows an annual average of only ninety fair days as St. Petersburg's portion of atmospheric delights, the Russian welcomes the capering Ram with rapture, and would willingly bring firstlings of the flock, in tributary sacrifice to the zodiacal deity.

The city of Perspectives presents, during those brief days of enchantment, a picture which seems to realise the ideal 'islands of the blest.'

On the far shining waters of the noble Neva the islands lie dotted, like so many fairy bowers burst into feathering green in one single night. The distant horizon with ships sailing, in appearance, between heaven and earth, blue above and blue beneath, seems peopled with fairy craft, the sails of which glisten like the wings of fabled messengers

fraught with refreshment and wonderment from distant climes. Here and there a brown sail, a gay flag or a floating pennon reflected in the shining mirror, like jewels set in the clear opalescent atmosphere, almost dazzle by their brilliant hues ; nearer home gay craft filled with happy parties of pleasure seekers cross to and fro ; greetings are exchanged in joyous tones, and the sweet sounds of laughter and of love come rippling across the waters in delicious harmony with the heavenly scene. All ranks are seized with the same ardent longing to drink deep draughts of the glorious sunshine, to inhale the aromatic breezes, the earthy fragrance of the newly-turned ground, and the delightful coolness of the growing greenery. Merry groups, family parties, children, betrothed lovers, grand-parents and friends seated on the green ground ; the bruised herbs, the broken branches and twigs carried by the younger ones, in triumphant testimony to those less happy, kept by adverse fate at home, of their extended trips and travels ; the bright apparel that replaces the monotonous disguise of furs and touloupes, caftans and pelisses, tippets, hoods, and veils—the very glitter of the gilded domes, the colour of the coppery

cupolas—all combine to present an *ensemble* such as must be seen to be realised; and, once seen, can never be forgotten.

It would scarcely be too much to say that in these early elysian days of renewed life and hope, St. Petersburg refuses to go to bed. Not a moment must be lost. After the long gloom and bitter cruelty of the grim and merciless winter every minute is precious, incomparable, inestimable. Princes and peasants, peers and people, the droschky-driver and the porter, the shopkeeper and the soldier, the police-spy and the merchant, and so on through all the infinite grades of the mixed population of a vast cosmopolitan city, the subjects of the Czar make holiday. In its heartfelt simplicity and sympathy, in the thankfulness, the gratitude, the hope and the courage, as in the combined emotion or action of any large multitude, there is always something inspiring.

Adverse as the elements composing this particular public undoubtedly are, it is yet united by one great feeling of joyous brotherhood. There is nothing taught, nothing sought, nothing made about it. It is the common

heart of humanity going up in gratitude to God for past preservation and present delights.

It is as though each man said to his neighbour, in the joy of his heart, those old yet ever new words: 'Lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land!'

Seated at a writing table, the full sunlight streaming in upon her shapely head through the open window, Esther Rodostamos paused, pen in hand.

That she was busily engaged the sheets strewed over her writing-table might be supposed to testify; and yet it was easy to see her heart was not in her work, at any rate, not in it at that moment.

Her tiny hotel on the Wassily-Ostrow, the envy and admiration of her friends, is built, after the French fashion, *entre cour et jardin.* But the name of hotel seems almost too pretentious for the modest dimensions, and simple, if solid, architecture of Esther's dwelling-house. The forecourt surrounded on three sides, on the right and left by stables, coach-house, and

offices for the *valetaille au fond* of the *corps du logis*, or principal building, is separated from the road by tall iron railings on a stone coping or low wall, the gilt arrow-heads of which sparkle in the sun like the spears of a detachment of lancers at halt. All the principal rooms are at the back of the house, and face the 'sunny-side,' that great desideratum to the householder in northern climes, where a month more summer and a month less winter (to say nothing of economy in fuel) amply repay the extra ten or twenty pounds rent which the wily proprietor infallibly extracts from the unwilling pocket of his victim, in consideration of the priceless advantages included in the sunny aspect of the coveted dwelling.

But Esther has no landlord. Her house is her own, and she dwells in it without fear of that notice to quit, or that nightmare of exorbitant additions to rent, such as are wont to vex the souls of ordinary mortals.

This 'bijou residence' had been one of the many 'gallantries' offered by her father to his young and beautiful wife, and had been secured in turn to his daughter by the loving prevision which seemed to have guided every clause of the will constituting her sole heiress

of Styro Rodostamos's great wealth and vast estate, real and personal.

In a wicker chair at the back of the room sits a placid old lady knitting. The monotonous click of her needles, as she mechanically pursues her employment, is the only sound that breaks the silence which reigns supreme.

'I think the spring must be in my blood!' Esther exclaims impatiently, as she rises suddenly from her uncongenial task, scattering several of the loose manuscript leaves on the floor by the unwonted impetuosity of her movement. 'I won't be conquered; but no wretch at the treadmill ever found his task more disheartening and uncongenial than I find mine to-day!'

As she speaks, she draws the lace curtain aside, and looks across the flat green enclosure (dignified absurdly enough as a 'park' by her friends and acquaintances) towards the shining Neva. She has only to call for a wrap and a parasol, and in a few minutes' time she may be seated in the dainty pleasure-boat which is always moored up ready for use under the rustic boat-house at the end of her garden.

'Nature is too strong for you, my dear,'

says her kindly duenna. 'You will have to give in, and join the other pleasure-seekers. Such innocent pastime can, surely, include no self-reproach.'

'No, *Tantchen*, but neglected duties would. If I had not idled so much time away during the bad weather, I might be free to amuse myself now.'

The sound of a carriage driving swiftly across the courtyard arrested her speech. She held up her hand in token of attention. The rooms giving upon the garden front afforded no view of the entrance, though the sound of the horse's hoofs on the pebble-paved enclosure was plainly audible through the open windows.

'Hush!' said Esther; 'it is too early for visitors; besides, I gave Michael orders that I was not at home to anyone.'

'Some one or another of your friends trying to tempt you into joining a spring-frolic, as befits young spirits,' says her companion, smiling up at the girl with fond approval and encouragement in every line of her genial countenance.

Michael's appearance on the threshold, carrying a card on a waiter of old Russian *repoussé*-

work seemed to confirm this view of the matter, but before he could approach her Esther cried impatiently: 'Take it away, Michael! What is the good of my giving an order if you suffer people to send you to me to have it enforced? I told you I was busy. I can see no one.'

'Would it not be better, dearest, to hear the message?' asks the old lady.

'No; yes; that is, I suppose since Michael has consented to bring one, my visitors will already know that I am at home, and that it will be incurring the charge of churlishness to refuse myself.'

'Please, most gracious mistress, His Excellency would take no denial; he said if I would explain that he has no desire to intrude, but that your gracious orders were he should call upon his return, and he only arrived in the city at eight o'clock this morning.'

'His Excellency? Let me see. Oh!' and Esther threw down the card with an expression of impatience, irritation, and amusement combined. 'I thought it was an ambassador, at least! When will you learn, my good Michael, to give people their right titles? However, after this long parley I can scarcely

send you down with a refusal. Tell the gentleman that I am busy, but that I will make it convenient to see him'—and as the faithful old servant left the room, 'It is only Lord George Peveril,' she said, looking across at Fräulein Fest, and frowning slightly as she spoke.

'Already?'

'You may well say so. I thought he was good for another three months.'

'Take care. He will hear you, and, since you desired him to call on his return——'

'Under the impression that he was to be absent the greater part of the year. Though even to say so is a perversion of the truth. When he pressed me to name a time for receiving him, as I was determined not to do so again before he left, I only said, as in civility bound, that I would see him on his return.'

'Do not be ungracious to him, my love.'

Before Esther could reply, and whilst the look of vexation was still darkening her face, the sound of a manly footfall in the corridor caused her to raise a warning finger to her lips, and to shake her head at the kind-hearted sentimental old lady, whose sympathies seemed to fall naturally to the share of the sufferers of

humanity. And Lord George Peveril, she considered, had been a great sufferer.

George John William Peveril was the second son of the Marquis of Matlock, and his godparents being old-fashioned persons had conferred those commonplace names upon him in his baptism, with a calm conviction of the propriety of so doing unknown to our more searching times, when calendars are ransacked, poets worried, and circumstances distorted or invoked, as the case may be, in order to afflict the helpless modern infant with an appellation that shall excite the future scorn, wonder, or envy of his fellows, according to various circumstances of time and place, and accidents of inheritance and development. Enthusiastic and spasmodic sponsors are probably laying up a store of jeers and sneers, of sarcasm and insult in the public school of the future, for their darling godson, which will scarcely cause the young man to bless their memories very fervently; whilst the gawky Guineveres, the black Blanches, the sallow Roses, the red-handed Iseults, the limp Victorias, the dowdy Alexandras, and the dumpy Enids of the coming by-and-bye, will reap a plenteous harvest of mortification should the damsels

prove sensitive. George John William, though he laughed at the threefold prose of his baptismal register, was in effect rather proud of it. No one could laugh at him; nothing could be expected of him, for Georges, Johns, and Williams, he argued, abound, and nothing ideal attaches to any or either of these names; you can choose which you like, they were all equally commonplace, and all warranted to 'wash' equally well. Milton was 'John,' and Shakspeare 'William' by accident, and as to 'George' what could possibly be more prosaic than the Hanoverian variety with which Britons are apt to associate it?

The Marquis of Matlock, George John William's father, had entered into the bonds of regular matrimony at a very advanced time of life, at a time, indeed, when all his contemporaries were thinking of the closing scene rather than of the opening one. But the Marquis, whose ideal was, and still remained, the Fourth Gorgeous Sovereign of that dynasty, had gone strictly on the poetic principle of gathering his rosebuds whilst he might, since old Time was still a-flying; and thus it came about that, a long procession of rosebuds having withered into the unknown, he only began

late in life to think of matrimony and sober household joys such as might adorn the family tree.

He hated his brother and heir apparent, and he loved liberty. Thus he pushed liberty to the extremest licence, and only sacrificed it at last to something he loved still better, the pleasure of witnessing his brother's discomfiture. He married the youngest daughter of a designing woman of good birth and small means. The bride was a girl, almost a child out of the schoolroom, equally ignorant and innocent. She did as she was told, and was glad to get away from her hard worldly mother. The result of this union of decrepit, or almost decrepit, vice with green immaturity was that after a year the youthful Lady Matlock presented her lord with a lean, weak-eyed, sandy-haired son, hereinafter to be designated John William George, Earl of Dovedale. Then, after a space of three years, during which time Lady Matlock developed into a fine, robust young woman, a second son was born, the George John William, whose duties as *attaché* to the British Legation may be supposed to have recalled him unexpectedly to St. Petersburg. His mother was dead, but,

strange to relate, his father lingered on, a terrible nonagenarian whose irascible temper and antiquated oaths were the terror of all who came within ten miles radius of his malignant tongue.

George John William does not belie his names. He is a robust, good-tempered, tall young man, square of shoulder, fresh of colour, resolute of aspect, and bright of eye. Popular amongst men on account of his frank humour, unassuming manners and readiness to oblige, he is one of those of whom women are apt to speak, if called upon to speak at all, with unflattering acquiescence as negatively admirable. His good qualities they could not deny; but, in a word, the young man was not 'interesting.'

For his part he had loved his mother, and had adored a little girl, his master's daughter at Harrow, until time having transplanted him to the University of Oxford that rapturous passion had died out, starved to death *faute de nourriture*, and brought his studies of 'the sex,' as his old father would have said, to an untimely conclusion.

Fate, and family interest, and a diplomatic career—though a less diplomatic being never aimed at Excellence—had brought him a

year ago to St. Petersburg; 'to Esther,' he would have said, in his frank, prosaic, matter-of-fact way, if by chance the conversation had turned in that direction. And now, as he comes with eagerly outstretched hands into the bright morning-room, his frank cheerfulness, the anticipation of pleasure beaming in his well-opened round blue eyes and lighting up his pleasant face, the cloud passes from Esther's brow, and she gives him a friendly hand, saying laughingly as she does so: '*A la mode de Grande Bretagne*! But what, in the name of all that's miraculous, brings you back so soon?'

The young man does not see the duenna in her dark corner, he only sees Esther upon a background of golden glory, and at her words his ingenuous countenance falls immediately.

'*So soon*, did you say? That is not complimentary; but I suppose I may take it that you have been having, as the Americans say, "a good time," and so it has passed quickly to you; it has not done so to me; it has seemed very long.'

'You may "take it" as you like it; and I am never complimentary—nor for the matter of that are you. What has Fräulein Fest done

that she is not to enjoy the light of your countenance? You might recognise her by her knitting, I should think, if by nothing else.'

'A thousand pardons,' said the young man blushingly apologising; 'but, coming in out of the light into the darkness, you know, one gets dazzled, and that sort of thing.'

'Dazzled with the darkness, Lord George? Never mind, *Tantchen* forgives you and so do I, for on such a glorious day as this one is utterly demoralised and ready to forgive even one's worst enemies.'

The infatuated young man gazes on her with rapture. The words, never very fluent with him, die away upon his lips. There is an awkward pause. Esther blushes with vexation at the undisguised admiration of his gaze. Then, in order to hide her annoyance, she assumes a lightness of manner which the simple fellow mistakes for gaiety and good-humour, and goes on:—

'You are the traveller, the stranger, the sightseer; it is you who have had the "good time" of which you spoke, and the least you can do is to tell us about it; so begin at the beginning.'

'I have had no good time,' Lord George

says gravely; and with a shade of embarrassment in his tone, he adds: 'On the contrary, I have had a very bad time. I thought you might have heard, have seen—something—different in me.' He winds up in confusion.

'Different in you?' Esther repeats wonderingly, 'what does the young man mean?' She does not see that his hat, which he has deposited under the table, is swathed in what undertakers would have us believe depicts the ante-penultimate of woe. For the rest, black is, all over the Continent, the appropriate garb for a complimentary visit. The deeper the hue and the more consistently carried out, the more complimentary. And Esther, called upon to look at him, attributes the magpie alternations in his costume to the fact that the first visit after absence may be considered one of eminent ceremony for the official 'Frack.'

'I see no difference in you,' she says presently, having sufficiently considered his habiliments. 'It must be my dulness or forgetfulness. What is it?'

'My stupidity,' the poor fellow stammers. 'I ought to have expressed it differently. Things happen, and one takes it for granted that other people know. How could you?

What I meant was that, that I—that we—well we have lost—that is, poor Dovedale is dead.'

'Do you mean that your brother, the Earl of Dovedale, has died since you have been away?'

'Yes.'

'And does that make any difference? I never understand these things in English families. Why you should have three names—your father one, your brother another, and you a third; it is so strange—and why you should not be called Lord Peveril.'

'I can understand that it seems strange.'

'Will this make any difference in that way?'

'Oh, yes! But that is the least difference.'

He was thinking that had Esther been a young English lady of his own rank of life, she would have known to a nicety all that was included in the loss of an only elder brother, the heir to a Marquisate. Whereas Esther had never troubled herself to inquire if he had any brothers at all, elder or younger.

'Still it is a difference; what are we to call you now you are no longer Lord George Peveril?'

'You need not call me anything. My bills will be made out to Lord Dovedale, that's all.'

Esther blushed a deeper shade of crimson as, in a somewhat constrained voice, she said: 'Oh, that is it—Milord?'

'Pray — not *that*; for you *that* could never be.'

'And why not for me? There can be no exception in a thing of this kind, I should say,' Esther answered stiffly, as though there were latent offence in the subject.

'Of course not. I only meant no lady, no friend, none of my friends' wives would so address me.'

'Very well; that I understand. I have no ambition to graduate in lacquey-language, but these things are, you will allow, somewhat difficult for foreigners to understand. Now I shall know. But what other differences may we look for?'

Vexed as she was, and inconsistently pleased as she would have been to say some cutting thing, Esther could not but acknowledge that Lord Dovedale's simplicity of nature would make any suggestion that he thought, or expected others to think differently of him *as*

Lord Dovedale, coarse and tactless in the extreme.

Still, she had her own reasons for being vexed.

'Well,' said Lord Dovedale, blushing as he looked on the ground, 'the worst of it is, after poor John's death I mean, that my father being an old, a very old man, thinks it my duty to take up my position, and——'

'He is right,' said Esther, promptly.

'I dare say. But it will be hard on me. I shall lose many valued friends; all the liberty and irresponsibility of life; I——' and his face darkened painfully, 'I shall have to leave my profession, abandon my career, quit St. Petersburg.'

His voice faltered; there was an awkward pause. If he had expected sympathy, sympathy was not forthcoming. Esther was too sincere to feign a sorrow she did not feel.

'Change may always mean for the good,' she answered. 'It is better to be Lord Dovedale in England than Lord George Peveril in St. Petersburg. With duties will come ambitions, and you know what your own poet has said on that point.'

'No, I don't. I don't read poetry. Prose

is hard enough for me,' Lord Dovedale answered ruefully, with the simplicity of a school-boy.

The talk limped lamely along for a few uncomfortable minutes; then looking across at Fräulein Fest, and seeing that lady sat as firmly as her name, and that Esther was inexorable, the young man searched the carpet for his cloth swathed cylinder, and rose to take leave.

'You are going out, or ought to be,' he said. 'St. Petersburg is *en fête*, a paradise of beauty on these spring days. I will, if you will allow me, take an early opportunity of calling again.'

'If I will allow him?' Esther repeated to herself. 'He will do as he chooses, whether I allow him or not. These vastly humble persons are always masterful in proportion to their humility. However, Matlock and Dovedale fight on my side.'

Seeing the cloud on her young friend's brow, Fräulein Fest was wisely silent.

'We must take a drive after that,' said Esther, drawing a deep sigh of relief as the door closed upon Lord Dovedale's exit, and she struck a small silver bell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CLERICAL ERROR.

As the ladies drove through the throng of holiday-makers towards Peterhof, Esther was silent. The outlines of the low-lying mountains on the Gulf of Finland showed dark in softly undulating purple masses on the distant horizon, and the road was swarming with pedestrians who, like their typical hero, felt a pride and satisfaction in getting out of St. Petersburg, in order to see 'how the city looked' from a distance. This was, in fact, the *raison d'être* of Peterhof, which, since its founder's time, has grown to limits undreamed of in his philosophy. In the park, to-day, hundreds of villas, imperial and otherwise, in every style of architecture, with every refinement of luxury and comfort, of splendour and eccentricity, call forth the ready admiration of sightseers. English, French, and Italian gar-

dening, the latest combinations in kaleidoscopic beds and riband parterres, never cease to delight the native, whose national pride, flattered by finding himself between two glories, only adds to his normal good-nature and contentment. Again and again salutations from the crowd, a smile of recognition here, a wave of the hand there, greetings everywhere, testified to Esther's popularity with all classes; but at length their swift charioteer brought them beyond the distance possible for pedestrians, when even this trivial interruption to her thoughts was spared Esther's impatience.

She and her companion were such good friends, so thoroughly understood and respected one another's peculiarities and individualities, that there was no occasion for ceremony between them.

'You will forgive me if I am silent, *Tantchen*' said Esther, laying her hand lightly on that of her companion, and addressing her in the German language, which was as music in the old lady's ears.

'Be as you like, my love,' answered her friend, her gentle nature flattered by the endearing diminutive which Esther had bestowed upon her as more homelike and affectionate

than the 'Fräulein' of conventionality. She was used to it, if custom could make her so, and yet she never heard it without pleasure, as, I think, a mother can never hear from loving lips that most sacred of all names without a sense of sweetness and mercy. The very letters lend themselves to softness, and the syllables enfold and include the word like an embrace. To the child (it may be a brawny sunburned man divided by thousands of miles of sea and land from the home of his youth), to the child the word 'mother' brings a vision of tenderness and protection; it is a talisman of love and safety (for a mother may save her son unconsciously from a thousand perils of which, in her pure and sheltered womanhood, she does not dream). To the mother it appeals by all that is holiest and most sacred in nature; and the clause in our great intercession reads always (to me) 'for all motherless children.' The father, who is supposed to supply their material wants, is a loss indeed; but who may define the unspeakable loneliness of a 'mitherless bairn'? a creature twice orphaned; whose body, bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, is the mother's special solicitude; whose soul, 'poor little, timid, fluttering thing,' deprived of

her care, is tossed hither and thither on trembling wing, and dreads and hopes it knows not what.

Esther, who was motherless (and who cherished her mother's memory with an almost passionate worship), whose father had died too lately for her to have ceased either to expect or to miss him in her daily routine, had a special longing for some semblance of family life, a special *cultus* for the domestic virtues, an ardent appreciation of the modest graces, and tendernesses of 'home.' If ever she allowed her attention to wander from practical matters, if ever she suffered imagination to stray in the direction of a possible future, it was less castle-building than home-life, home interests, home-love, home-influence, that formed the architecture of her dreams; not the successes of society, not the pursuit of pleasures (so-called), neither the (to her) charmless charm of the world, with the pomps and vanities attendant thereon, that she coveted. When she had learned to love Fräulein Fest as much as she esteemed her, and not before, she proposed and adopted the playful German diminutive which was so pleasing in the old lady's ears.

As Esther drew her mantle about her and settled herself comfortably in the corner of the carriage, we may partly follow her thoughts, and partly say a few words about this solitary girl, whose position had caused so much speculation in St. Petersburg circles.

As has already been said, her father, Styro Rodostamos, was a Greek banker, a man claiming descent from an ancient and honourable house, of which the younger scions had first sought success in mercantile ventures and financial speculations during the latter half of the last century. He had married to please himself (for he had no kith, and kin only so remote as not to influence his resolve) a beautiful lady of Hebrew descent, who, in due course, had made him the proud and happy father of a little daughter, the Esther whom we know.

Esther's mother had lost her parents at an early age, and she had then passed into the care of an uncle and aunt residing in Paris. She had little or no fortune of her own, but by that law of brotherhood, and that unwritten rule of liberality which prevails amongst the Hebrew race for those of their own kin, she was made welcome in the house of Acosta.

Here she shared her cousin's education and amusements, was dressed by her aunt with taste and costliness, and might have been fairly happy but for two circumstances—her loneliness, and the absence of anything like serious thought or religious observances on the part of those with whom her lot was cast.

Originally descended from a distinguished family of the Jewish race settled in Spain, the head of which had been ennobled and had enjoyed signal honours at the Court of Madrid, the Acostas of later times had ceased to be exclusively Spanish; and court emoluments, decorations, titles, and showy honours having somewhat palled, the younger generations had sought independence and gained fresh vitality abroad, establishing themselves as bankers and merchants in France, Germany, and England, and were known everywhere as people of brilliant talents and solid wealth. Their name was dear to them, less on account of historical decoration and traditional power, than for its unstained probity, its soundness on 'Change, and the universal respect in which it was held wheresoever men of business mostly congregated together, all over the world. But—as was not to be wondered at—they had, in some

of their branches at least, fallen away from the old faith; and although they had not become professedly apostate or registered themselves as renegades, by pretended conversion to Christianity, they had in so far grown indifferent to the faith of their forefathers as to be regarded with pious horror by the orthodox amongst the Israelites.

This separation sat lightly enough upon them. They could not take the repudiation very deeply to heart when Society opened its doors to them, and their dinners and dances were thronged with the wealthy and the idle of all nations.

The men of the family found amongst men that these matters were of no consequence. Outwardly Catholic, conforming '*par respect humain*' as the Church says, to the rules that govern the so-called Christian communities in which they dwelt, the French, Italians, Germans, and Spaniards with whom the Acostas came in contact were, man for man, almost without exception, 'free-thinkers,' which, in modern parlance, stands, as often as not, for a freedom that never exercises the right divine of thought.

The ladies of the Acosta family were not

imaginative. They were healthy, young, and rich. They bestowed such powers of ideality as they possessed on their dress, their amusements, their flirtations, their enemies, their successes, and their annoyances. Grief had never touched them, nor sorrow beckoned them, though but for a moment, aside. In a crowd of flatterers of all ranks and all complexions, it was scarcely likely that even the chilly glances of negative criticism, which, now and again, fell upon them from the more serious of their own people, should disturb their equanimity. Had they lived in a small community it would, and must have been, different. As it was, certain trains of thought, certain grave problems, pressing heavily upon the men of to-day, as such questions have ever pressed upon the serious in times of transition, as in the unknown future they will continue to press on responsible leaders of opinion when affairs indicate the eve of any great epoch in the history of humanity, such thoughts were altogether outside their everyday trivial, narrow, and materialistic range.

But with Esther's mother it had been different. The remembrance of old words and old observances, of old forms of faith and

scrupulous compliance, with a thousand punctilious claims and obsolete exactions, still hung about and disquieted her soul, leaving the girl grave and thoughtful in the intervals of gaiety, and often more deeply perturbed in mind than anyone whose conscience was either easy or unawakened would have imagined.

But, when Styro Rodostamos, in Paris on business, was brought home by Michael d'Acosta, and introduced to his wife and daughters, Noémi's hour, although she did not know it, had struck. The offer was soon made; with the impulsive Greek it was love at first sight. The uncle and aunt accepted his proposal unconditionally, delightedly; and to show his approval, Michael d'Acosta presented his beautiful niece on her wedding-day with a string of pearls, each individual one of which was worth a king's ransom (as kings are taxed in the modern monarch market). Her aunt's taste in the selection of the *trousseau* was extolled by every matron in Paris who had pretensions to fashion, birth, riches or beauty; and when the girl asked, timidly blushing, beneath her breath, 'Where are we to be married, uncle?—in what church, I mean?' her uncle answered with a Homeric laugh, his large hand descending in

boisterous amity on her shrinking shoulder: 'Why, where should you be married, my girl, but in the church to which your husband belongs? Styro Rodostamos is a good Greek, and the Greek Church is as good as any other, I take it, for the purpose in question. You take him for better for worse; all he has and is henceforth will be yours; and if you would be a happy wife take my advice and conform in all things to his way of thinking. Don't split straws; all religions are good if you will only see it; what is not good is bigotry and bitterness, and the strife that grows of dogma and opinion. Be faithful and loving, honest and true; and I don't suppose that what you call yourself will make much difference. Rodostamos is a generous fellow. He wants nothing with you, and settles a handsome sum upon you. Had it not been so I would myself have doubled your little store; but it is better you should go to him, owing him everything; it pledges you to good conduct—not that I doubt you for that matter; so, no crying, or we shall have an ugly bride, and I am proud of my pretty niece.'

So the girl had gone to her husband. His had not been a severe rule. Born and bap-

tised into the Greek Church, Rodostamos conformed because convenience required it; but he had drunk deep of the liberal ideas of his age, and was nothing of a bigot.

His wife was his constant companion, his trusted friend. Where he went she went; and he was a great traveller, making hurried journeys, swift and secret, according to how loans had to be negotiated, or the money markets of the world manipulated. He wondered how he had ever lived without the gentle, affectionate creature from whom he was no longer, so he said, separable even for a single day. Amiable, gentle, and fairly cheerful, always ready to obey his behests, to greet him with a smile, to enjoy any passing amusement as she was, there was yet a subtle something about her for which melancholy would be too strong a term, and apathy an unjust one.

Sometimes, when quite alone with Esther, Noémi would sing with extraordinary power and pathos some of those wonderful chants which the Babylonians required of their captives in their heaviness, acknowledging their pathetic songs to be an extraordinary musical treat. Much older than the Psalms of David, these heart-stirring melodies are traditionally said to

have come from Mount Sinai, and, transmitted from mouth to mouth, have been fitted with words according to the requirements of time and place by succeeding generations.

If not her personal isolation (a thought which she herself would eagerly have repudiated as implying want of loyalty to her husband), perhaps the national misfortunes of her race, still in these remote generations wanderers on the face of the earth, nationless and homeless, an orphaned and an outcast people, may have tinged her voice with melancholy as she sang, almost secretly, in a strange land these ancient songs of Zion. The harp, it was true, they had hanged upon the trees that were therein before following their conquerors into captivity; but the words they had brought with them, hidden deep in the recesses of their hearts, to be murmured in dreams, breathed softly at dead of night, when no hostile ear could hear, and when the sleepless captives gazed hopelessly at the inscrutable heavens reflected in those Babylonian waters.

The echo of these songs of her mother's youthful days lived and lingered in Esther's memory long after the voice that had given them life had ceased and was silent. At the

time, they seemed to float far above the child's head, and to lose themselves in some mysterious distance, into which, after her own childish fashion, Esther fancied her mother's great wistful eyes could penetrate.

Yet one other thing of childish years and fond mother-love had remained with her. Her mother's nightly benediction, learned from *her* mother, and used, not as a matter of dogma or faith, not as pertaining to the Jewish religion, but as a fond familiar formula; the only one, in fact, that came involuntarily to her lips as she bent over her darling's bed and whispered a blessing on her sleep, 'In the name of Jehovah the God of Israel, with Michael on the right and Gabriel on the left, before thee Uriel, behind thee Raphael, and at thy head the Holy Ghost' (Schechinath-El).

Otherwise the little creature learned but the vaguest lessons of theology from either father or mother; and brought, later on, a mind absolutely unprejudiced to bear upon the questions that have occupied and exercised humanity for countless ages.

Inheriting from both father and mother extraordinary facility for languages (for Styro had all the versatility of the modern Greek, and

Noémi that aptitude for languages which seems a birthright of the Jewish race), Esther had yet further advantages in the Russian system of education, which provides the children of wealthy parents with a German tutor, a French *bonne*, and an English governess, as soon as the little creatures begin to form syllables in their native tongue. Languages learned thus may not be very correctly learned; much will depend on individual idiosyncrasies later on; but they are learned without difficulty, without grammars and tears, without rebellion and punishment; and they give a wonderful *àplomb* and sense of independence and power to those who have the happy 'gift of tongues,' rendering them easily approachable, courteous, and apparently amiable; capable of complying with that politic Pauline precept which lays it down, as a rule, that we should be 'all things to all men.'

As with his wife, so with his daughter.

Styro Rodostamos, robbed of his companion, struck down to the very depths of despair by the loss of his one love, had yet too strong, too robust, too healthy a nature to succumb entirely to grief. He took, in the place of her who was gone, Sorrow—'No casual mistress, but a wife'

—to his heart, and shared it between Regret and his little daughter. Time the Healer found Noémi not less regretted, but mourned after another and gentler fashion. Esther sat by her father's side, as his fair young wife had sat; but in the girl there was another and less obedient spirit; there was a more restless and less acquiescent soul; and though she said little she thought much, listening carefully, weighing such words as struck her intelligence, questioning her own mind, and seeking enlightenment eagerly on all sides.

Styro Rodostamos was not a *savant*; he was a cosmopolite; the essentially modern product of contemporary circumstance, and as such admirably suited to the world in which he lived, and to the work he had to do in it. He was intelligent, versatile, and many-sided in his way, and without ostentation an enthusiastic patron of the arts; his door was open to all men of more than average merit, no matter what their faith or nation; his table daily honoured by the presence of many a distinguished foreign guest; and, as time passed, and the claims of business relaxed their hold upon him, his house became popular as the rendezvous of what was best amongst

the unclassed and unclassable intelligences which the life and friction of a great city brings to the surface of society. Thus, before Esther was old enough to take any ostensible part in it, a circle was already forming around her; and for two hours every evening, in a simple stuff or cotton frock, the child, by her father's wish, sat apart at a little table in the great gilded *salon*, by the side of her staid English governess, and listened wonderingly, with her head bent over her work; for her father, who desired that she should be in all respects brought up practically, insisted on her proficiency in woman's handicraft. 'No expensive and useless "fancy"-work, but plain sewing and stitching, darning, and mending. Who knows? she may marry a great traveller, some Livingstone or Baker, some Humboldt or Schweinfurth of the future,' he said in his plain practical way. 'Will they have a retinue of lady's-maids to sew on their buttons in the desert? Besides, it is proverbial that such minxes want far more waiting on than their mistresses, and begin to call for brandy and smelling-salts before the ship has got fairly out of port.'

He thought there was something endearing,

soothing, and domestic in the presence of a gentle woman busy with her needle; silent if her husband were at work; sympathetic if he looked up in 'a pause of the day's occupation,' and asked her opinion or advice. In his wife's lifetime he preferred to come to her for any trifling repairs that his costume might require, rather than leave it to the care of a servant; and looking fondly at her deft and pretty fingers he was pleased to see the rings he had given her sparkling upon them, flattered that she always used a thimble, one of his first gifts during the early days of courtship. Then, the word of thanks, the little praiseful compliment, and the kiss given and received, all these had had an abiding charm and sweetness for him and had made him insist on little Esther's persevering in the homely accomplishments of sewing on buttons and knitting socks, let her future be what it might.

As the girl and her governess thus sat, sedately employed, many amongst the older men would come up and pat the child approvingly on the head, and say a word or two of compliment to Miss Jackson, praising the home-like industry and sensible occupation of her pupil. But Esther liked it best when they did

not notice her; when, deep in the discussion of art or politics, of modern ethics, the amelioration of the human race, the future of conflicting interests, she saw her father ready and able to hold his own, speaking with an animation and power and a practical common sense that insured him the respectful attention of his assembled guests. These arguments, of which she often only heard the commencement, were her delight and pride, and she would often surprise her father by asking the next morning how the matter had ended, and whether So-and-So had prevailed or been worsted in the fray.

At eighteen, her education requiring now less constant study, Rodostamos had introduced his daughter to 'Society.' They spent one winter season at St. Petersburg. The following winter was passed in Rome; the next in London; the third in America, where they visited the principal cities of the United States. The intervening months they travelled in Germany, France, and Switzerland. In Paris they had repeatedly found themselves, and Esther had there made the acquaintance of countless cousins amongst Michael d'Acosta's children and grandchildren. Everywhere she saw every-

thing, always accompanied by her father, who seemed to taste fresh youth in acting as cicerone to his daughter. There was nothing forced, nothing affected, nothing of the vapid attitudinising and jargon of a certain school of modern would-be connoisseurship in Esther's spontaneous enthusiasms.

In the presence of strangers reticence instinctively teaches us to hide all more intimate and sacred feelings, but even with her father, dearly as she loved him, there were long intervals of silence, when Esther would commune with her own heart—respecting all she saw, and thought, heard and imagined—and be still. Some things there were that she could not speak of, and these she pondered silently, feeling that her father was not the person who could help her out of such special difficulties, which must be laid aside now, to be met later on. His frank, harmless enjoyment of all present pleasures, his wholesome, heartfelt appreciation of all the blessings of life, seemed effectually to remove him from the debateable ground of doubt and inquiry, speculation and misgiving.

Then came his sudden and unexpected death, and a period, to Esther, of stunned and

stupefied grief, of numb and dumb endurance, followed by a season of wild rebellion, such as threatened for a time to permanently poison and warp the sweetness and uprightness of her gentle nature.

No special religious teaching had prepared her for this blow. It may be that no teaching of any sort could have prepared her for it, though it might have imposed submission and silence, and the formulas of humility and acceptance upon her. But in her desolation and misery she rose rebellious, and hardened her heart, and set her face in bitterness to endure loss and loneliness as best she might, refusing impatiently all comfort.

Such a state could not last. She was young, tender, and a woman. Something she must have to love; and not finding the necessary food for heart and mind within her own four walls, all the tenderness and enthusiasm of her nature, all its passionate yearning for action and self-sacrifice, flowed into the broad channels of public charity, and found an outlet in devotion to the cause of suffering humanity in the world at large. Her private affections took the form of an intense and zealous worship of the dead. Suddenly it

seemed to her that the oppressed race of which her mother came, in its centuries of sublime martyrdom, of sorrowful exile, and silent endurance called for some special recognition, some personal atonement at her hands. It became a point of honour and loyalty with her to identify herself, by word at least, with such of her long-suffering brethren as would endure the identification, and by deed silently, using her agents as she could find them, with all who were in sorrow, need, sickness, or any other infirmity, ministering to their necessities through others, who were content not to require any formal profession of faith or declaration of dogma on her part, the afterwaft of those wonderful melodies, the songs of Zion, which her own mother, a stranger in strange lands, had sung over her cradle, became, now that even the last faint echo of them had died away in the far distance, inexpressibly dear and sacred to her. She remembered how those Babylonian exiles, when called upon to sing for the idle gratification of their captors, had replied by a refusal. 'As for our harps,' they said, 'we hung them upon the trees that are therein;' and as to songs, the Lord's song they would not be persuaded to

sing in a strange land; for how could they forget the country of their birth, how forget that Jerusalem to which the tribes went up, even the tribes of Israel, the type of the everlasting city not made with hands, whither the chosen of God should also eventually journey? In their exile they yet boldly declared to their masters that they 'preferred Jerusalem in their mirth,' that Jerusalem of which they could only sing under protest in a strange land; and that they would rather their tongues should cleave in silence to the roof of their mouth, and their right hand, skilled in all manner of arts and industries, lose its cunning, than that they should forget the undying claims of the sacred city.

Esther had travelled too much, was too gently nurtured, too sensitive to forms and harmonies, to make herself ridiculous by any extravagance of demeanour or loud profession of faith. To orthodox and pious Jews she knew that she would be as a reproach and a scandal inodorous in their very nostrils. The ties that had bound her orphaned mother to that race had been too loose to prevail over the later and stricter bond of marriage with a professing orthodox Greek; and Michael

d'Acosta and his family, though proud of their descent, were absolutely indifferent on all matters of doctrine. They had made no pretence of being 'converted'; the painful and pedantic scruples of the Hebrew law, the puerilities and intricacies of Israelitish ritual, the vexatious and superstitious exactions of the Jewish faith, they would have frankly ridiculed, had it come in their way to do so, with as little hesitation as would the 'pagans' of any other nation; and thus Esther felt it behoved her to make her advances very cautiously, lest at the outset she should prove a stumbling-block or a cause of offence to brethren of the stricter sort.

The years she had been absent, travelling with her father, had wiped out all remembrance of her, in so far as her one short season at St. Petersburg was concerned. At that time Julie de Kerezoff had been with her husband in Asia Minor, and the beautiful Countess Perowsky was still in seclusion at Katchaloff. Thus it was that the gossip which nicknamed Esther the 'veiled prophetess,' the 'fair Grecian,' the 'beautiful unknown,' and half a dozen other such vapid titles, had scarcely compared notes enough to discover that the lady under dis-

cussion was identical with a lovely girl who had appeared in their midst five seasons ago, at Court balls; had been asked to all the best houses, and had disappeared not to return again. Of those who had known her slightly, some were absent, some were dead, a few vaguely remembered, and a few claimed acquaintance with her. But she was still too much of a novelty for 'Society' to have ceased talking of her, her antecedents, whims, wealth, and way of living, or to have ceased discussing possibilities and probabilities in connection with her name.

Lord George Peveril saw her and fell in love with her. 'Madly,' his friends said, 'wisely,' as he averred. He knew nothing of the fabulous fortune ascribed to her by report. He impatiently refused to hear anything about or to believe in it. For his own sake he would have preferred that she should have been poor; not abjectly, hungrily, miserably poor, but decently and comfortably indigent, say on a few poor hundreds a year. But he indignantly refused to have the tale of her wealth forced upon him. He knew that if she were a female Crœsus he would still strain every nerve to win her; but he would prefer not having to battle

with his pride, or to exasperate his love by conflict with that demon. No pride, he determined, should rob him of possible bliss; of happiness, the proudest and most perfect a man could know: and thus he turned a deaf ear to all those gilded reports which as inevitably surround an heiress as the aureole surrounds the pictured saint. He knew he was not worthy of her, but no man, so he told himself, *was*; and no maudlin refinements of scruple should thrust morbid humility into the foreground, to the detriment of an honest, manly, and altogether upright love.

Esther, accustomed by her prerogative of beauty and wealth to no inconsiderable amount of homage, was utterly astounded when Lord George declared his passion. She was even more than astonished; she was vexed, not to say angry. She refused him with very little of that amenity which is supposed to gild the bitter pill of rejection. But he, on his side, refused to accept the refusal.

This exasperated Esther and roused her pride.

'You do not know me,' she said.

'I know my own mind.'

'And I do not know you.'

'You can learn to know me.'

'But I desire no such knowledge, Lord Peveril.'

'You may know me well enough, at any rate, to call me by my right name;' and then, in a pleasant, cheerful, brotherly sort of way, he strove to initiate her into the bewildering intricacies of that publication which has been called by the profane, 'The Book of Life.' 'Wicked people say the peerage is the Englishman's Bible, you know,' said Lord George, in explanation.

'I am afraid I am not great at the Bible, to my shame be it spoken,' Esther replied.

'Well, that's a point in common between us. I always got bad marks for my Bible lessons at school, but I don't know that I was ashamed of it; all the other fellows were as bad, or nearly so.'

'It might be no shame to you; it is different with me.'

'Because girls *are* different, you mean; pious, conscientious, dutiful, and all that sort of thing?'

'Not at all. Because I am a Jewess. That was what I meant. I am not pious, nor conscientious, nor dutiful.'

If she intended him to be surprised she was gratified. The colour rose to his face.

'You are laughing at me,' he said; 'joking at my expense.'

'I don't know why you should think so. I see no joke in it,' she replied, 'nothing in the least funny or amusing. It may be want of humour on my part; but to me there is not the faintest gleam of the comic in such a fact.'

Something of offence in her tone made him feel that she was speaking the truth, and that he had blundered.

'I thought you were mystifying me,' he said simply, after a few minutes. 'I see now that you were not.'

'Not at all. I told you you did not know me; and you see how little you know me, or even *of* me.'

'I could not know what I had not been told.'

'No, certainly; unless you had guessed it.'

'Such a thought never crossed my mind.'

'You need not disclaim; it has crossed it now. And that being so, we may as well have done with it. I have talked quite enough about myself.'

'You could never do that to me,' said the

lover, gallantly. 'But, may I ask you something?'

'If it is anything your conscience commends to your tongue.'

'Is it a secret?'

'Is what a secret?'

'Why—that—you are—your birth, you know——'

'That I am a Jewess? Certainly not.'

'Because I never heard it.'

'Probably because a girl bears her father's name, and a wife's identity is merged in her husband's; also because no one has troubled him or herself to examine my pedigree, and I have not thought it my duty to go about offering gratuitous information on a matter of no importance. Now you proposed to graft me on to your family tree, and as, root and branch, that institution is with you regarded as public property, and as something sacred, I thought it right to warn you of the fact.'

'It can make no difference.'

'It makes a difference to me,' Esther replied, proudly; and shortly after this the young man withdrew.

He soon presented himself again in Esther's drawing-room, but she contrived never to be

alone with him; and Fräulein Fest—who saw and secretly favoured his suit, had grown gradually to esteem and like this fresh, well-favoured, young English nobleman—had strict orders to mount guard as duenna. She thought it would be a good thing that Esther should marry. She had all the middle-class German's *cultus* for rank; and rank, combined with money on his part, and crowned by wealth on Esther's, presented, she thought, such an ideal combination of the palpable and impalpable, of the real and ideal, as her young lady was not likely to meet with twice in a lifetime. Though she did not dare to hint, much less to say so, she was afraid of Esther's enthusiasms, vagaries, projects. A good husband, the sobering cares of a growing family—these would be at once a safeguard and legitimate groove into which Esther's ardent feelings might run or tumble without danger of discomfiture.

'Think well what you are about before you refuse him a second time, my dear,' she said, by way of warning.

'I don't need to think, well or ill, *Tantchen*; my mind's made up. There will be no second time.'

'Your mind may alter. You may alter it. That is the lady's prerogative. And I am much mistaken if there be not a "second time."'

In this assertion Esther was, perhaps, not quite sincere, and therefore she refrained from further protestation. She knew there must inevitably be a 'second time,' possibly even a third; but the third she declared to herself, if it must come to that, should positively be the last.

She could not refuse Lord George admittance to her house; he had done nothing worthy of banishment. She was obliged to meet him in Society, unless she wished him to feel that his presence was sufficiently important to call on her part for effacement; but she avoided, by all means in her power, being alone, even to the extent of drinking a cup of tea or eating an ice in a crowd with him.

When people joked him about 'looking after the heiress,' he simply denied it, saying: 'I look after no heiress;' but when they said he was in love with Esther Rodostamos, he never attempted to controvert the assertion, though he condemned the taste that could couple a lady's name with any man's, however eligible; and that he was eligible—or would be—from

the Belgravian motherly stand-point, even Lord George's limited experience had taught him.

After 'the second time,' Esther got out of all patience.

'It is not fair, my lord,' she said, angrily; 'you ought to take "No" for an answer.'

'It is an answer I do not like; but why do you call me "my lord?" I know that you are angry with me, unjustly angry, as I think; but you need not use such extreme severity.'

'When you leave off persecuting me, I will leave off calling you "my lord."'

'I do not think you should say "persecute" you, because I am faithful. I love you too much to be proud, and, though you scorn me, you will come by degrees not to scorn my fidelity.'

'No woman likes to think her words are as empty wind. What is the good of my speaking if you disregard what I say?'

The third time Lord George had, rather against his own convictions, spoken on the eve of his journey to England. 'He either fears his fate too much Or his deserts too small, Who fails to put it to the touch, To win or lose it all.' 'There's luck in odd numbers,' he said, trying to encourage himself with quotations.

The result we know.

And now he had returned, several months before Esther had expected him, and (so she told herself) the worry would begin all over again. True, he was under orders to return with what expedition he might to the halls of his ancestors, but Esther had little faith in the magnetic power of that massive masonry as opposed to her own less substantial attraction.

Perseverance on the part of a lover had, she knew, been fatal to many a girl's liberty. What can a woman do when a man won't take 'No' for his answer? '*Gutta cavat lapidem non vi sed sæpe cadendo*;' and though she should in very truth harden her heart until it became as the nether mill-stone, 'time fights on the side of the drop,' especially a drop of 'the first water,' such as a scion of the Matlock-Dovedale-Peveril order.

'If she is engaged to him, why doesn't she say so; and if she isn't, why keep him dangling after her?' is a question often asked and seldom answered in similar cases; and Esther knew it had been asked about her. She had even been gently reproached on the subject by a certain august personage.

Though the Radical prints would fain have

us believe that a lord never works, and that the fiction of despatches, *précis*, identic notes, and so on are mere sand thrown in the eyes of the bovine British taxpayer, yet, as Lord George had certain duties connected with the Embassy to perform, he punctually performed them. The first time he wrote 'Esther,' for some other word beginning with an 'E,' it probably passed unnoticed; but, when a gossiping letter marked 'private,' and written to a royal personage at home, came back to Lord Adamant, Her Majesty's representative at the Court of St. Petersburg, with huge marginal notes of interrogation scored all over it, His Excellency thought it high time to remonstrate.

'What does this blanked blank nonsense mean, sir?' he roared at Lord George, who had been summoned to a private audience.

Lord Adamant and the Marquis of Matlock were contemporaries in so far that the heir of the Adamants was sowing his wild oats whilst the representative of the Matlocks was gathering in a vast and unprofitable harvest of youthful indiscretions. A more or less highly-coloured oath or two in those quarters was taken pretty much as a matter of course by the younger men.

'I am sure I don't know,' Lord George replied, rather red in the face.

'Then you ought to know, sir. You wrote it, and you ought to know what it means. I'll be blank blanked if I put up with such blanked impertinence and carelessness; it would disgrace the greenest *attaché*. Read it; read it aloud, sir,' as poor Lord George, in his embarrassment, made as if to leave the room, slinking towards the door in order that he might peruse the offensive document in the privacy of his own apartments. It ran as follows:—

'At the ball the other Esther, it was observed that the Emperor conversed for some time with the Egyptian Esther, who wore black evening suit and fez. The absence of the Empress made the attendance of ladies comparatively small; on the other hand, the Esther touched more freely on European subjects than would otherwise have been possible.'

There was more of it, but we need not trouble ourselves beyond this specimen.

'A nice idea His Royal Highness must have of my secretaries,' cried Lord Adamant; 'a more ribald, insolent, immoral and profligate letter I never read. One comfort, it will injure your career for life. I shan't stand between

you and the consequences of your own blanked blank folly.'

Lord George could only apologise profoundly. Explanations were not forthcoming. 'I shall look into it,' said his chief. He did look, and he found — Esther Rodostamos. 'You had better take care what you're about in that quarter,' was all he said to Lord George, and Lord George knew exactly what he had to expect.

The story somehow leaked out, and pared and polished was passed round at a *souper intime* by one of the court wits.

Thus at last it came to Esther's ears, in the form of a gentle reproach from an august personage interested in her fate.

'You have nearly cost that young man his situation; he is so bewildered and dazzled that he writes sonnets in place of despatches, and last week nearly involved us in a European quarrel. He is a good *parti*. You should put him out of his misery.'

And now that, as Earl of Dovedale, he had come back once more to renew his offer, Esther felt that, should she refuse him, everyone would write her down a witless weakling or a heartless flirt.

All her own friends were against her, thinking her foolish for not knowing her own mind; whereas she knew it only too well.

Fräulein Fest was against her; the few words of graceful badinage that had fallen from Imperial lips, pointed to the consummation of a wedding as one to be 'devoutly wished' by all well-disposed to the young people; and there was besides the fatal fact of the proverbial power of persistent water-droppings.

It was scarcely surprising that Esther, with all this in her mind, should wrap herself round in a mantle of silence as, leaning back in her corner of the carriage, she pondered gloomily on the inconvenience of the situation.

The long shadows and level rays of the setting sun warned the ladies that it was time to return home. Esther had just given the order and closed her parasol, when two gentlemen, riding rapidly from the direction of Peterhof, overtook the carriage, and turning, lifted their hats in passing salute.

Esther blushed crimson.

'That was Lord George—Lord Dovedale, I mean,' she said, correcting herself. 'And with him was Mr. Graham.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOLITUDE.

THE year was drawing to its close.

Hero sat by the drawing-room fire with an open letter in her hand.

The letter was from Bianca; and a close inspection would have told the curious that tears had fallen upon it. They were the mother's tears, not the daughter's.

On that occasion when we last saw Hero she had also held a letter in her hand. A letter enclosed to her by Mrs. Hudson, addressed to Bianca in unknown writing.

In truth, it was a mere note.

'My dear child,' it said; 'I forgive you. All the rest is, as your own poet says, "Silence."'

In her loneliness (for the great loss of her life had left her utterly lonely), in the feeling that her child, her one ewe-lamb, her fledgeling, the fostered pet of the nest, sheltered anxiously

from the outer world, dependent on those immediately about her for love and happiness, should have established intimacies and inaugurated a clandestine correspondence — a correspondence which the mother, in her simple philosophy of implicit confidence, dreamed not of—Hero felt herself betrayed. In the first revolt of her wounded feelings—feelings in which the anguish of what seemed to her like disloyalty, betrayal, lovelessness on her child's part, gnawed at her very heartstrings—she was paralysed. All that life had hitherto meant to her had crumbled into ruin. To Fitz she had, in the first overwhelming surprise of her sorrow, confided something of these feelings, and had declared she must have time to recover from the blow, and also to make up her mind as to what course of action it would be wisest to take in the future with regard to Bianca. Fitz, who had gone to her a self-constituted ambassador, to negotiate Bianca's return home, felt that he could no longer press the reunion of mother and daughter. He had wished it originally for Bianca's sake, thinking the moral atmosphere of Portland Place not good for her; but, having seen Hero in her thrice lonely misery, he had only desired that some warmth

of love and tenderness might unloose the iron bands that grief had bound round her heart.

Although no such word was spoken between them, it was tacitly understood that when Hero met her daughter once more, it would be with words of reproof and inquiry, with expressions of displeasure and condemnation. Indeed it could scarcely be otherwise. Even Fitz himself had mentally condemned her too easy-going acquiescent attitude. And, much as he loved the girl, he deplored her wilfulness. But now, weakness on Hero's part would be worse than her foregone blunders; it would be a crime. She must guide the girl who could not guide herself; who had, in fact, taken the bit between her teeth, and gone—who knew how far?—in a headlong gallop on her wild career.

'My dear child. I forgive you.'

Jealousy, the jealousy of family affection, that resents outside influence; the manly jealousy that looks with searching eye at the honour of its womankind; the jealousy of the lover who has not dared to approach the lady of his love with other than measured words; jealousy of the unknown, the undefined, the vague, the dangerous, which knows how fatal, in her ignorance of the world, all independent action

must be to a young girl, how hopelessly it may compromise her best happiness and involve her reputation for life—all these feelings sent Fitz on his homeward way, anything but rejoicing.

He left Hero, to come upon Mrs. Fitzgerald and Bianca at high words. And for a time he felt all the unwisdom of attempting to approach the exasperated girl with threats or remonstrances on the score of her deceit and secrecy, of her clandestine correspondence (for, man or woman, the letter he had in his pocket was the evidence of intrigue), of her want of straightforwardness and openness towards one to whom it was doubly due, towards whom deception was doubly false. The openness was due as from a child to a parent, but doubly due in virtue of her mother's implicit and generous confidence. Of her dispute with Bianca Mrs. Fitzgerald thought it better to take no further notice. There was, so far, an armistice that they met at meals; but each felt and all knew that at any moment the false semblance of peace might be shattered by the shock of some fresh encounter, and that, at best, they were but passing through a period of armed neutrality.

Besides, in the natural order of things, Bianca would be returning home.

No letter came from Hero. 'I wonder why mamma doesn't write,' said Bianca. This gave Fitz the opportunity he was looking for.

Truth to tell, the young lady would have been glad, in face of her aunt's grim austerity of demeanour, to have pleaded filial duties as the motive of a return home. Although, in her first outburst of rage she had declared she would never voluntarily go back to the roof that had hitherto sheltered her, yet reflection told her that necessity would compel a temporary endurance of the old outer conditions, until such time as independence of action should proclaim her definite emancipation from bondage.

Home she would go. As she crossed the threshold her demeanour should plainly show offence. She would, at a convenient moment, explain her grievances and announce her projects. Her mother would be overwhelmed with consternation, confusion, dismay, wounded affection. Then Bianca would loftily explain to her parent how she had forfeited her (Bianca's) esteem, and, in spite of tears and entreaties, she would unflinchingly take the course which by that time she should have

fully matured. But things were destined to fall out after a fashion somewhat different to the programme planned by Bianca.

Mrs. Fitzgerald was bound for Dulwich, whither she went once a fortnight to visit an invalid friend. On these occasions Bianca was always left behind.

'You were wondering,' Fitz said, as he came up into the drawing-room, after putting his mother into the carriage, 'you were wondering, Bianca, that you had not heard from your mother.'

She had fancied that he, too, had left the house for the afternoon. She jumped up, thrust a book under the sofa cushion, and with looks both cross and guilty :—

'Have you heard from her?' she asked.

'No. Nor do I expect to hear. But I am forced to speak to you, since when I last saw her I told her I would do so; and she may be waiting to hear from me.'

'Well?'

'Does your conscience smite you on any point? Is there any conceivable reason arising out of your own conduct, why your mother should not write to you?'

'No.'

'Think again, Bianca.'

'No.'

'Do you know whose writing this is? Do you know from whom this letter comes?' and he took the thin envelope out of his pocket, and held it up for Bianca to inspect from a distance.

Like a young panther, before her cousin had realised such a possibility, the girl had made her spring. The letter was in her hands, the colour flashed crimson into her cheeks, but she read it before answering his question. Then, looking at the seal: 'Who opened it?' she said.

'Do you know from whom it is?' he asked again.

'What's that to you?'

'It is something to me. But I don't ask it for my own sake, nor even on my own account. Do you know from whom it comes?'

'I do.'

'Will you tell me?'

'No.'

'Will you tell me what it means?'

'No.'

'What right has anyone to write "My dear Child" to you, except your mother?'

'And she never says it.'

'Repartee is no answer; nor is pertness in place here, for this is a very serious matter, though you may not think it.

'You are not my keeper.'

'No, I am only your cousin. But it might be my duty to go to your grandfather, and to consult with him as to the best course to pursue.'

No answer.

'Bianca, you will please understand that you have to answer me. What I say I say for myself and on my own responsibility, but understand that short of prejudicing the cause I represent, I do so in your mother's name and by her authority. Perhaps, if you will lay aside all pride and defiance, I may be able to help you. I desire to do so: with all my heart I desire it.'

But Bianca was invulnerable. 'You had better go on with your lecture, and get it over,' she said, assuming an air of passive endurance.

'There is no lecture; no sermon; only you will have to explain. You cannot stay here;

you must return home. Only, before you return, you must explain the meaning of this clandestine correspondence, and try to win your mother's forgiveness of an injury which it is not in the nature of things she can soon forget.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes, indeed and in truth. Perhaps you have behaved less badly than, on the face of things, might seem. At any rate, there is only one way out of the trouble now. If there be a way, it lies through a full, free, and ample confession of everything connected with the whole affair.'

Although he spoke so boldly, Fitz's heart was soft within him, thinking of all the misery the girl would have to go through, and yet knowing she must go through it—nay, that it was necessary to her salvation—if she were to be rescued in very truth from the snares of the fowler. All this, and much more, passed through his mind as he waited for an answer. But no answer was forthcoming.

'Well?' he said at length.

'Well, I have nothing to say—unless—may I ask you a question or two?' and Fitz,

who saw that anything was better than obstinate silence, replied that she might.

'Did you open that letter?'

'No.'

'Who did?'

'Who could have done so?'

'Did mamma?'

'Of course.'

'Have you read it?'

'I have.'

'Well,' said Bianca, getting up from the sofa and standing straight in front of him, the letter in her hand so close to his that he could easily have snatched it from her had the position been such as to recommend snatching to his intelligence; 'well, I have only this to say. I told you I would never forgive those who have deceived me, lied to me, kept me in ignorance of facts I had a right to know, treated me like a baby, kept me in leading-strings.'

'Let us forget all that, Bianca; you spoke hastily.'

'Thank you, I will not forget, and what I said in haste I repeat at leisure. What! my letters are opened when my back is turned, my correspondence is intercepted, seals are broken, confidences betrayed, and you expect me to

apologise? If I am deceitful, I have been taught a lesson of deceit; if I am rebellious, it is because a slavish, ignorant submission was expected of me. For myself,' the angry girl went on, inflaming herself with the sound of her own words, 'I do not care, or I might not have cared; but I will not jeopardise or betray the secrets of others. I know nothing about my father but that he is dead. Were he alive, though he had worked in the galleys, though he were branded by disgrace, though the world despised and rejected him, though he were in poverty and exile, I would go to him now' (she thought how her friends would applaud this defiance of the tyranny of the law). 'That I cannot do. There is not a soul in the world I can turn to. Your mother has outraged me; my mother has sacrificed me to her own selfish whims and caprices; told me nothing, treated me like a puppet, kept me in the dark, tyrannised over me under the pretence of love, mewed me up, though she has enjoyed not only the liberty every decent woman may, but the wider independence of public and professional life, whilst I, forsooth, must know no one, go nowhere, make no acquaintances, learn nothing of the world, but turn like a squirrel in

its cage in one long dull, daily round of monotonous routine, that might break the spirit of a convict! And you come to me with counsel to ask pardon, to cringe and crouch and cry, like a naughty child, to be whipped and to be forgiven. Thank you! All that is over. What my mother has done I can do. I suppose I can find money by hook or by crook. Amongst all of my father's name in Italy I shall surely find one who will put me in the way that I intend to follow. If not, I have other things—I have other friends, other projects in view. You have said I cannot stay here. I reply, I will not. I will not go home. If my mother had had any fault to find she could have found it herself. She did not need to confide her wrongs to you, and make you the ambassador of her griefs and woes, the arbiter and the umpire between herself and me. You have been vastly ready among you to cast me off, thinking I should come crawling to your feet, begging forgiveness and protection. You are mistaken! It is I who cast you off!' And in her passion Bianca snapped her fingers, and then waved her hand in protest, as though sweeping her foes out of the orbit of her offended vision.

Shameless, outrageous, heartless, as her

words were, Fitz would not let disgust get the better of pity, nor anger kill the kindness which this wilful girl so sorely needed. He told himself that love-follies and day-dreams had already died away, but that, in the absence of father or brother, it still behoved him to have mercy on this girl who had no mercy on herself—who, in her blind fury, would hurl herself headlong to destruction, unless something, as yet untried, might haply check her mad career.

'Bianca!' he said, and tried to take her hand. She snatched it from his grasp, thinking it was the letter he wanted.

'Not that,' he said, discouraged by her persistent wrong-headedness; 'what can it matter who has the letter?'

'It matters to me.'

'You refused to tell me from whom it came. Shall I tell you?'

'As you please.'

'It is from Mellin—Baron Mellin, as he calls himself.'

'Whatever he calls himself he is——. But that is a part of the narrow-minded illiberality that you, all of you, make your guiding rule, your text.

'And by what right does he address you as

"My dear Child?" A man old enough, it is true, to be your father, and to show you your duty to your mother, if you don't know it; but a stranger to your mother, misleading you——'

'A man who is above, who has no time for, all this petty personal rubbish.'

'I understand the reproach, but it cannot influence me. I cannot be above the duties and affections that lie nearest me. Nothing is petty where you are concerned.'

'You take a mistaken view of your duties.'

'And what of my affections? I have known and loved your mother for years.'

In her bitter wrath and jealousy a new thought struck Bianca, and its novelty and its suddenness caused her, even in her rage, to pause and look at Fitz with new eyes, wondering if she had been so blind as it now appeared to her distorted vision.

'For years,' he repeated, emphasising the words; 'and I have never seen her say or do a thing I would have wished said or done otherwise. She has been brave in misfortune, enduring in trial, industrious, modest, dignified, and uncomplaining in adversity. She has been a good daughter and a good mother. As a wife I did not know her, but those who did

have never been heard to blame her. Can I remain unmoved when I go to her, as I went a few days ago, and find her sitting by her desolate hearth, grieving for the loss of her mother, longing for the presence of her child, the child to whom her whole life has been one long devotion?'

'She should have found some object more worthy of her devotion.'

'She should, Bianca, though it ill becomes you to say so. I should not be a man if I could see all this, and not be moved to pity. In the name of love and every dutiful feeling, I implore you to bethink yourself; to let better counsels prevail; to go to your mother, frankly and freely, whatever it may cost you, acknowledge your faults, and try, by tenderness, to heal the wound that is rankling in that tender breast. She is your mother; think of that. It implies every claim and every duty. I am sure you will not reject my appeal.'

But she did reject it. To her mind, perverted by passion, every word in recognition of her mother was condemnation of herself. No one cared how *she* might suffer, no one offered *her* sympathy and aid; well, she would do without them all. They should see.

And thus, buoyed up by her jealous wrath, animated by a wild longing for liberty, with resentment beating loudly at her heart that an attempt should have been made to restrict her life to the safe limits of home, Bianca made no compromise as she felt no qualms. She told Fitz what she meant to do, and he saw that no argument would prevent her doing it. He did not even recommend that she should be thwarted. She put her name down at a governesses' agency, and she wrote to Mellin and to Julie de Kerezoff to look out for a situation, either as reader and amanuensis to a great lady, or as governess to young children in some noble family. She was now seventeen, and, as she said, looked considerably older.

It was better she should do this, Fitz told himself, than that she should go to Italy, either to be adopted by one or other of the Martello family, or, on pretext of studying for the stage, to sink into the easy manners and frivolous existence of so-called 'professional life.'

All these arrangements must take time, and that time had better be spent under Mrs. Fitzgerald's roof, for Fitz at length succeeded in frightening his mother into self-control by telling her that if Bianca committed any

public act of folly the disaster would be laid at their door. He went to and fro between mother and daughter, and won Hero to his own views, and even persuaded her to forego seeing the girl before she left England, promising her that he would go a stage of Bianca's journey with her, when the time for departure came.

The mother's pride and wounded affection were ready for any compromise. But the daughter was obdurate. Indignation still vexed her 'as a thing that is raw.' She had no desire to go to her mother's house, and though her sense of obligation to Fitz would have perhaps induced her to make the concession had he pleaded very hard, she was—by his urgent advice to Hero—not called upon to make it. He wished to spare Hero the fresh disappointment which must inevitably be her portion if mother and daughter met.

Julie de Kerezoff and the lady at the governesses' agency both recommended her for the same situation as governess to Prince Paul Karishkin's sons, the grandsons of that Prince Karishkin of whom we have had a dissolving view at the ball in the Winter Palace.

It was Fitz who lent her the money for her

travelling expenses, and for the additions necessary to her modest toilette. She was in black, and said she should wear nothing else so long as she was in Russia. It was Fitz who saw the last of her on foreign shores as she set out on her solitary journey.

Again and again he had implored Hero to write to Graham, and tell him of her troubles and let him come to her. His secret thought, scarcely formulated to himself, was that Hero's heart, unless some near human sympathy touched it, would not bear the strain of events. But she persistently refused. To her it seemed impossible that she should complain of, lessen, or lower her child in the estimation of the one man in all the world to whom she would fain have shown Bianca, a flawless gem. But Fate, in this one particular, was stronger than her will.

One day, just after he had left Hero and was walking gloomily homewards, Fitz stumbled on Graham arm in arm with Lord George Peveril. Fitz and Lord George had been undergraduates together, and had both known Graham when his art had brought him once more to the town of the Thames and the Isis. The youths—finding their acquaintance of the palette and white umbrella was an old Oxonian

—felt a double interest in his work, and were proud of Graham's notice when he, now and again, accepted their frank and free academical hospitality. It pleased him to find himself once more within the kindly embraces of Alma Mater, and the youths, to whom he seemed a traveller, a man of the world, an artist, and a gentleman, looked upon his kindly patronage as an honour. Thus there were exclamations of pleasure when the three men met in Holles Street, and Fitz heard with secret satisfaction of a Government commission, which included an inspection of Russian art-treasures and antiquities, that was to make Graham the guest of Lord Dovedale at St. Petersburg, for which capital they were to start almost immediately.

Hero refused to see Graham, wishing before all things not to be betrayed into explanations regarding Bianca's sudden emancipation; she would leave the delicate matter in Fitz's hands, begging him to tell Graham that she was too much shaken by late sad events to see anyone, and might leave town any day, as the state of her health urgently demanded change of air and scene. Graham called twice, but was not admitted. He was secretly hurt at being relegated to the ranks of mere acquaintance,

but made no sign. Meanwhile it was settled, to Hero's intense relief, that Graham should, in that distant land, keep, if possible without being seen, an eye on Bianca, her doings and surroundings. He need never come across her path unless he chose; on the other hand, he would have every facility for keeping them *au courant* of her proceedings.

It certainly seemed like leading Bianca to the stake, or to the altar of sacrifice, or putting the bowl and dagger within convenient reach, thus precipitating her into the arms of her secret correspondents; but Fitz had been accidentally cheered by a few words Lord Dovedale had let fall with regard to Mellin.

Asked if he knew him, he had answered 'as much as anyone (except a chosen few) could know him;' that he was a busy man, full of scientific manias and hobbies; a dreamer and a visionary, and so indifferent to the charms of the fair sex that the wags had invented a witty proverb at his expense, together with more to the same effect, which made Fitz hope and believe Mellin alike too prudent, and too indifferent, to compromise himself by conspicuous friendliness towards Prince Karishkin's governess.

Thus it was that Graham found himself at St. Petersburg during the first days of early opening summer, whilst Bianca had accompanied the Karishkin family to their estates in the Crimea.

There had been an unwritten compact, arranged by Fitz, that none of the burning questions at issue between mother and daughter should be entered into by letter. Bianca seemed quite unable to do her mother's purity of motive and blamelessness of life, justice; and Hero could not forgive a long system of treachery and deceit, culminating in open rebellion on Bianca's part. Had the rebellion been explicable, had the girl revealed anything of the attitude of her mind beyond revolt, it might have been easier to deal with, and certainly easier to excuse, her. Much might have been allowed for something tangible that could be argued or explained away. But of the hidden motives and influences at work, Bianca would say nothing; entrenching herself behind a bristling phalanx of her own grievances, that made it impossible to convince her others had causes of complaint far graver than her own.

For Hero there was nothing but incessant occupation unless she meant to succumb to the yet

worse misery of brooding over her griefs in inaction. She had more pupils than she could well find time for, and her solitude gave the opportunity for a resumption of old pursuits. Two songs, of which the words and music were hers, had become popular during the summer, and she already began to repent their publication. Several music publishers, and one or two managers, had called upon her; a larger life was once again open to her recognition; popularity, and the possibility of an ever-increasing social circle, easily within her grasp. But she turned from all offers and persuasions with a disgust and bitterness of soul that, in a less sweet nature, would have speedily become resentment. Even now, as she sat alone with Bianca's last letter in her hand, there seemed to her a horrible mockery in the brass band at the end of the street, and the barrel organ round the corner, both braying and grinding out the melodies she had grown to shudder at. Presently street boys would take up the refrain, the milkman would whistle it behind his cans, the costermonger over his barrow, joining in chorus where the tune struck his sympathies. Thousands of tongues and lips and voices daily repeated these words without a thought of the

writer, who sat craving for a crumb of comfort, for a word of love in her blank solitude; coveting a token of sympathy in vain.

From her present superfluity she could extract none of those pleasures which she had promised herself to enjoy through Bianca's eyes, after a fashion that had not been possible to her own youth. She had sent the girl a handsome sum of money, the result of the melodies of which she was already repenting. The money was returned. 'I am paid so generously,' Bianca said, 'that I cannot spend my wages. It would be absurd for me to wear jewels or expensive stuffs; we are living here in a vast green solitude, the nearest shop thirty miles off; all our wants, which are necessarily few, supplied from the estate. Prince Karishkin's agent goes now and again to town, and executes our commissions. Silks for the Princess's embroidery, writing paper for me, twine, tops, paints for my pupils. But we live in too princely a style for anyone to be troubled about trifles. The list is made, the items are paid for, we get what we want, and there is no more about it.'

But the Karishkins would soon return from

the Crimea, and then Bianca's life in St. Petersburg would begin in real earnest.

Hitherto the existence she had led had been negative. Her pupils took their lessons in the open air; she was free to wander with them at will in the vast solitudes surrounding the château. She had much time to herself. The long days spent in the park and plantations; the monotony of the routine, attendant on the *vie de château*, in a remote district, had given her ample time both for reading and reflection. The Princess, a delicate, amiable woman, who liked to have pleasant things and people about her, was interested in the girl's youth and beauty; puzzled to see a well-bred young lady, who was entirely at her ease, whose manners were charming and whose tact was perfect, in a subordinate position. Too weak, with too little power of volition to specially attract Bianca, she had, so far, gained her affection that the girl desired to please and obey the gentle lady. When they were alone she would sing to the Princess, whose enthusiastic love of music made her own weak chest and enfeebled condition painfully irksome to her.

'You must have lessons all through the winter when we get back to town,' she said;

'and you must sing at my receptions some of those strange characteristic Scotch and Irish melodies which all foreigners love so much better than you English do;' and Bianca smiled and thanked her. But it was not of her songs she was thinking.

St. Petersburg was her Mecca and Medina, her Canaan, her Promised Land, her Jerusalem; the shrine that held her prophet. A winter at St. Petersburg included a thousand nameless possibilities, in the anticipation of which not even the level monotony of Khotineff life seemed irksome. It only gave her greater leisure to picture in imagination the days that were coming, when, once more, all that was worth living for, all that she longed to be, to do, and to suffer, would give full employment to her faculties, renew her energies, and prove to her sometimes faint and faltering spirit that no grain of sand is too insignificant for incorporation in the brick, no brick so unworthy but that it may help to the final edification of the temple.

It was scarcely possible that the long months of intimate intercourse at Khotineff should pass without an occasional allusion to the events of the day.

Prudent as the Karishkins were, they had no cause to fear Bianca's indiscretion, for she had come to them at Madame de Kerezoff's recommendation, who had urged her *protégée's* claims on Prince Karishkin with her usual energy.

'Will your father visit us this summer?' the Princess Paul asked of her husband one day at luncheon.

'No, I think not. He did not tell me his plans, but I fancy he expects to have business at a distance which will call him away from Russia.'

'Ah!' said the Princess, smiling, 'he still thinks us shabby, half-hearted, poor-souled creatures—a sort of mean-spirited "*Ukrivateli*;" and turning to Bianca, she added, 'from *his* lips that amounts to a term of reproach, you know.'

'Indeed? I do not understand the meaning of the term in any sense,' she replied.

'"*Ukrivateli*" are persons,' the Princess said, 'who, although of recognised position—as, for instance, members of the aristocracy, of the upper middle classes, officials, military and civil, from the highest to the lowest grades, including every branch of the service, even the

police—share the revolutionary ideas of the Propaganda, and yet take no active part in the struggle. Persons who, for reasons of their own, remain passive, yet are ready and willing to make use of their social influence, and to lend powerful aid to the disaffected, by concealing, when necessary, both the leaders and their subordinates; both the persons and things which would compromise them if found in their possession. Thus, when my father-in-law, who is an ardent supporter of advanced ideas, calls us "*Ukrivateli*," it assumes, in his mouth, a sense of reproach.'

'This cannot be interesting to Mdlle. Martello,' said the Prince, rising to leave the room.

'Indeed it is,' Bianca replied earnestly. 'We in England know so little of these things, that I am most anxious to learn all I can.'

'Ah!' said the Princess, looking affectionately after her husband, 'you cannot guess how difficult our position is, nor how I tremble for the future. Prince Paul has the most liberal ideas; he belongs to what is called the second party in the State. Numerically it is very large, and socially it is very strong. At its head we reckon our future Emperor, Prince Tcherkassi, the two Akasoffs, Katkoff, the editor

of the *Moscow Gazette*, and many other distinguished men, whose names you would not know. They call themselves the "National Party," in contradistinction to the old Tory or Court party; and they perhaps chiefly differ from more advanced Liberals on the question of the means to be employed to attain the end in view. Mercantile people, rich traders, bankers, a great proportion of the clergy, the army, and civil servants belong to us, and place all their hopes for the future of Russia, in the temperance and wisdom of our counsellors.'

'And why should Prince Karishkin object?'

'It is *we* who object. Violence, crime, outrage, and intimidation can only delay the fulfilment of our hopes for our unhappy country. These upright gentlemen, whose characters and honour are stainless, and who have large interests at stake, see nothing but destruction and ruin in the outbreaks and lawlessness of rash, hot-headed, obscure persons, without weight or authority, without conscience or religion. And every fresh outbreak delays the reforms which a liberal enlightenment acknowledges to be the most pressing necessity of the political situation.'

Bianca looked at her silently. After a

pause—'How wisely you speak!' she said. 'I thought, Princess, that you knew nothing of politics.'

'It is my husband's wisdom, not mine,' the Princess answered, blushing as she spoke. Her love for him gave her in such matters as he had at heart a larger intelligence.

Bianca wondered whether any information she might thus pick up would be useful to Mellin.

'And Prince Karishkin?' she asked, as if recalling the speaker to the text.

'Oh, my father-in-law goes to extreme lengths, as you would probably infer from the fact of his close friendship with Madame de Kerezoff, who makes no secret of her opinions.'

'She never spoke to me of him, or only incidentally.'

'Of course this is one of his estates, only he allows us to live here whenever we choose. He is so very kind that I cannot bear to say a word which might seem disrespectful to him; but he is a living contradiction. As a boy he was educated in the corps of Court Pages, and his brilliant abilities caused him to pass every examination with *éclat*. His love of science led

him to prefer travel to Court service, and he applied for permission to visit Siberia, on a journey of geological research. He extended his travels to China, and on his return to St. Petersburg he became president and associate of various scientific societies. He received several decorations, and was made Chamberlain to the Empress. He published a work on the glaciers of Finland that attracted much attention at the time; and no one suspected him of any active interest in politics until, after a long absence in Belgium, Germany, France, and Switzerland, he confessed his advanced views. Disguised as a working man, he gave (under the name of Borodin) lectures to the working men of the Alexander Newski district, and told them the history of the "*Internationale.*" The police bribed the men to betray him, and he was arrested on the *Newski Prospect.* The trial caused the greatest consternation in St. Petersburg "society," and his sentence to three years' imprisonment excited much indignation in certain classes. Fortunately for him, he was allowed during confinement to continue his scientific writings, and on his health breaking down he was sent to the hospital, and passed the rest of his term under tolerably favourable

conditions. But his opinions, far from having undergone modification during confinement, are more extreme than ever; and his son, who is deeply attached to him, lives in constant dread of some catastrophe. He sees in his father the tool and dupe of interested persons; for the National Liberal party abhorrently disclaims all participation in crimes of violence and blood. The—Nihilists,' said the Princess, sinking her voice and hesitating at the word, 'have, undeniably, shown enthusiasm, courage, and determination; but wrong-headedness, defiance, and excitement cannot accomplish the mighty task which lies before the regenerators of Russia. So far they have put forth no plausible, or even possible programme; they form no ostensible, no steady, respectable, representative party, with a consolidated interest in the State, with functions regularly filled and fulfilled. They are a body without a Head, a following without a Leader!'

The announcement that M. Aïvasovsky—a celebrated artist whose estate adjoined that of Khotineff—desired to pay his respects to the Princess, dispensed Bianca from all reply.

CHAPTER XXV.

A RIVEDERLÀ!

EVENTS were, however, not destined to fall out in accordance with Bianca's programme.

All was ready for the return of the Karishkin family to St. Petersburg, when the Princess took a severe cold. The doctor attached to the household, who acted as travelling physician whenever the family moved, declared the journey not to be thought of. Then, as the violence of the attack passed away, he confided to Prince Karishkin that his wife's only chance lay in wintering in the south—Egypt or Italy.

Bianca heard his fiat with dismay. She hoped the wilfulness which, had she been less amiable, might have made a despot of the Princess, would cause her to rebel; but for once the lady was convinced that all who knew her desired to fulfil her least caprice, and

she submitted without a word of opposition. Probably some inner monitor told her that a speedy escape from the rigours of a Russian winter would afford the only chance of seeing another spring, for she urged forward the preparations for departure with an almost feverish anxiety, as though dreading lest any untoward accident should make the journey impossible.

She took it for granted that Bianca would accompany her little charges, from whom the mother would not consent to be separated.

'I should have gone to Egypt, but for you and them,' she said sweetly. 'I fancy they would suffer from the necessary shifts and inconveniences of Nile-travelling, which, let one do what one may, is always rather of the picnic order of existence; and for you, all our fine projects of an Italian master can now be realised with a freedom of choice that even our beloved St. Petersburg could not have afforded.'

'Only that I cannot go with you, Madame.'

'You are jesting. How can I replace you? And my poor boys! they will lose all their English just when they were getting on so nicely.'

'At their age a few months can make but little difference.'

'You must go with us.'

'Excuse me. I meant to have spoken to the Prince, so as not to trouble you; but I have had no opportunity, he has always been busy. But, since you are so much better, Madame, it is only right that I should tell you I cannot accompany you.'

'But why not?'

'I came to Russia as you go to Italy.'

'For your health?' asked the Princess, smiling; 'that can scarcely be.'

'No; but because I meant to come here. Had I meant to go to Italy, I should have gone there.'

The Princess looked at her in amazement.

'Do you know, you English are wonderful,' she said—'wonderful, almost horrible, almost unamiable in your unvarnished bluntness and independence. *I meant—I should—I should not*—and at your age, when most girls are timid shadows, hiding behind their mother's——'

'It was precisely because I was not timid, and not a shadow, that I determined not to hide behind, or be hid by my mother, Madame; but I must not intrude myself or my family

affairs upon you, since they can be of no possible interest. Excuse me.'

'Not at all; I am interested,' said the Princess, eyeing her with curiosity and wonder. 'But you are not altogether English: so much your name tells; and perhaps that may account for many things which puzzle me. I don't know how well-born young Italian girls may be brought up; Nature is sooner ripe in the south, and seventeen means a woman, I am told, in warmer climates.'

'Will you let me know when it will be convenient that I should leave you?' asked Bianca, passing by the Princess's reflections.

'But, my child—forgive me for calling you so' (and the delicate lady stretched out a thin blue-veined hand and laid it on Bianca's, who sat looking at the glittering gems, but made no effort at response)—'but we, we are not barbarians; we cannot leave you. We must at least find a home for you, look after your interests and your comforts. That responsibility is laid upon us.'

'You forget, Princess. I can write to Madame de Kerezoff, who recommended me to you; and I have other friends in St. Petersburg. The families of the English agents,

Messrs. Hill, Hardcastle, and Simcox, have shown me kindness and hospitality; and, thanks to your liberality, I am dependent on no one. If, unfortunately, I cannot go with you, I need not be a trouble to you.'

'Well—if you will have it so. But write at once, so that at least I may know you are safe before I set out on my journey southwards. You see, in spite of your southern blood and my northern chilliness, I care more for you than you do for us, and I could not have you under my roof these many months and feel no responsibility, no anxiety on your account. I know you have no such tenderness for me; but you would have, were our positions reversed.'

The gentleness and generosity of the noble lady touched Bianca more than she would show. She recoiled from anything like intimacy directly the subject turned on herself and her own belongings. She knew that the Princess was too indolent, too easy-going, too much accustomed to take existence *en grand*, to interfere with her in any way. A lady who has been nurtured like an exotic, fed and dressed, and carried hither and thither by a kind of oiled machinery which makes life a variegated pageant, takes a great deal for granted, and is not likely to

trouble herself actively about the private difficulties of her dependants. A *posse* of peasants appeared to welcome a kind master and mistress when the Prince and Princess visited their estates; through the agent or the 'Pope' certain charities were liberally subscribed to; during the winter months noble philanthropic ladies in St. Petersburg called on Princess Paul for contributions to orphanages, hospitals, penitentiaries; she bought costly rubbish by the cart-loads at bazaars for inundations or famine-stricken districts; but these things came and passed, smote the ear for the moment, moved the heart to a tender emotion of pity, inspired a pleasing sense of benevolence, and an amiable satisfaction in being able to give of the very superfluity that made 'necessity' a practical fable, and then, like other transient things, evaporated into the trackless space of a by-gone past.

Perhaps an energetic English lady, howsoever 'great,' in the world's estimation, might be her position, would have gone a step beyond formulating the amiable theory of hospitality advanced by Princess Karishkin, which repudiated indifference to Bianca's fate as a barbarism. Such an one would probably have

found time, when Society's claims were satisfied, if not before, to look more narrowly into the antecedents and character of her children's chosen 'guide, philosopher, and friend.' But Princess Karishkin's education had not tended in the direction of personal duties and assumptions. She seemed scarcely less an exotic than the choice and costly stove plants whose sickly scent made, all through the winter, the atmosphere of her hermetically sealed *salons* so oppressive to healthier natures. Her own old peasant-nurse was at the head of the nursery; the French *bonne* was a responsible, capable woman, and the boys so young, that the romps of the under-nurses and the fondling of her own old foster-mother seemed more appropriate to their years than the instructions of a governess; and thus, during her husband's frequent absences, the Princess made Bianca more and more her own personal companion, and appropriated her services with far greater pleasure than would have been the case, had the girl been less personally attractive, or her little charges of an age to make graver demands upon her time.

But this very companionship, Bianca dreaded, might pledge her to more devotion than she felt; might bring about questionings that she

would fain avoid; and inspire the Princess with the idea of an attempt at control which Bianca, in anticipation, already declared to herself was not within the Bond. Thus she prevailed so far that Prince Karishkin, who, like his wife, held elastic views of life, and was accustomed to deal with men in groups or masses, not individually, declared they had no right to control Bianca against her will, and that, beyond taking care she escaped any equivocal position, they must renounce all further direction of her movements. His yacht was to meet them at Odessa so soon as the Princess was able to travel southwards; and under the charge of their German agent, Bianca should then set off for St. Petersburg.

'Do not pledge yourself for more than six months,' said the Princess, in farewell, 'for you must return to us when—if—we come back with the swallows.'

And feeling all danger of too great familiarity to be at an end, Bianca impulsively kissed the delicate and kindly hand held out to her in farewell.

'No, no; not that,' cried the Princess, and pressed her lips to the girl's cheek; 'it is your will that prevails: it ordains that we shall part.

But let there be no farewells. *A rivederlà, Martellina mia!*' and with something strangely like tears in her gentle eyes, Princess Paul drew the *portière* hastily across the door of her boudoir, leaving Bianca cloaked and booted on the threshold of her journey into the Unknown.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'THE OLD ORDER PASSETH AWAY.'

It was Horace Walpole who once exclaimed, speaking of Russia, 'What a terrible country, where Siberia is next door to the drawing-room!'

In other countries revolution rises from below; in Russia, as often as not it descends from above.

Old wrongs, smouldering grievances, class prejudices, party persecution, taxes, insufficient and mean-spirited legislation, indifference to the poor man's woes, vexed questions of capital and labour, resentments engendered by abuse of privilege, and a thousand kindred causes, may in other countries at any moment kindle into a flame the smouldering spark of discontent. But in Russia things are differently ordered.

The revolutions, which from time to time have brought the then existing state of things to a conclusion, have been called 'Palace Revo-

lutions,' and by common consent the conspiracies contemptuously classed as 'Drawing-room Cabals.' In old days the definition was in so far correct that the assassination of a sovereign, the overturn of a favourite, or the change of a dynasty was effected by some favoured and powerful few, who, 'behind the scenes,' made their calculations, took due precautions, and trusted to Surprise paralysing resistance; the prestige of success finally carrying the day, as it always does, and always must do, with semi-civilised nations.

But Russia, which seemed slow, in comparison with other European nations, in imbibing popular ideas of liberty, having once tasted of the 'perilous stuff,' assimilated it, all things considered, with amazing rapidity.

To-day the 'drawing-room' is no nearer Siberia than the kitchen, the barrack yard, the dissecting room, the lecture hall, the theatre, or the hospital. If the *salons* send their contingent of hundreds of distinguished victims to swell the long train of those martyrs to 'ideas,' who for so many successive generations have pilgrimed Siberia-wards in grim procession, to the resounding clank of chains—the echoes of which seem to rouse the Russian populace to

exasperation,—the lower ranks of modern society have contributed their thousands to those mines, the bare mention of which sends a thrill of horror and revolt through the Russian breast.

Looking at other nations, Russians eye their rare professions of sympathy with profound distrust. How, they ask, can you understand that we care for liberties which have so long been yours that you, unthankfully, take them as a matter of course? How can you realise that for the trifles forming a part of the privileged daily routine which you hold to be yours of right, every patriot-Russian would gladly lay down his life? How can you appreciate the anguish of humiliation and misery we feel, the heart-sickness and despair we endure at the robbery and jobbery, the wrong and oppression, the unredeemed cruelty and neglect, which go year after year, decade after decade, unrepresented and unpunished, because the whole people of this vast empire are in the hands of a privileged few? The system that should redress such wrongs (were such a hope granted us) must needs be so comprehensive, would require so severe a scrutiny, so conscientious a trial, would exact such

implicit good faith, singleness of mind, and steadfastness of purpose, that, even suppose it could be elaborated and applied, where could the statesmen and politicians, the judges and administrators, incorruptible, brave, experienced and hardworking enough, be found to put the vast machinery in motion, and keep it going? We must have men specially educated to such ends. But to such ends, our first and most urgent need is, education for the masses; not of the conventional colourless pattern, such as results in a glib facility for using or abusing modern languages, as the case may be; nor the jargon of art and science, nor the mere pedantry of the schools. We must have liberal instruction in the social systems of other countries, their laws and institutions. We must have license to examine into the causes and effects of class warfare, class privilege, and class prejudice; and, above all things, we must bring patience, integrity, and love to bear on the result, and learn how we can best serve the ends of public justice!

It was this peremptory cry for education that opened schools and universities in Russia, offered liberal facilities to the youth of towns, and introduced an emancipation from the

trammels of precedent, that broke down old barriers in its new intensity and ardour, and demanded that clinical lecture-rooms should be opened to women at a time when the medical classes were still shut to them in all other European countries. Long before the clamours of the would-be wise virgins of Edinburgh were causing the male students to rise *en masse* and leave the ladies to the undisputed possession of their invaded benches, girl students were an accomplished fact in the Russian universities. That Herod should out-Herod himself is no new feature in the phenomena of philosophic freedom; and Russia may claim the honour of having led the van of advanced opinion as regards the privileges, liberties, and license of female medical students and medical practitioners.

Anyone who has travelled, as it is possible to do in Russia, day after day over vast expanses of plain, whose level ever-receding horizons seem to promise inexhaustible stores of monotony to come, must have asked himself again and again, 'Where is the population?' Catherine the Second, inspired with profound enthusiasm for the Occidental idea in the legacy she had indirectly inherited from Peter the

Great, endeavoured to create a *bourgeoisie* as she had created a *noblesse*, on the French model. To this end she built in twenty-three years no less than two hundred and sixteen so-called 'towns.' Merchants of the first class were to belong to the rank of nobles, and the sons of certain officials to become *ipso facto* 'of the nobility,' as everyone who attained to the fifth official class, should obtain hereditary rank.

The bureaucracy increased largely by this attempt at hothouse commerce, where artificial means were used to keep the forcing system at a certain temperature. But an Imperial ukase will not and cannot alone create and develop industrial enterprise; and although, in the first instance, the taxation of classes seemed to afford a prospect for active officialism, and a new crop of State servants were nourished by the labour of artisans and peasants, and by the taxation of an artificially created population, yet the system was too false to live; and before long, topsy-turvydom worse confounded, merged all things in a general 'abomination of desolation.' The 'towns' rotted away and dropped into oblivion; the vast army of greedy officials (*Tchinovik*) dwindled and disappeared, leaving in the majority of cases a

heap of ruins to tell the story of an inchoate folly.

Thus, as has already been said, the modern traveller, looking out over versts upon versts of unbroken solitude, asks himself, 'Who tills the ground, sows the corn, reaps the harvest, fells the trees, folds the flocks, drives the herds?' It seems impossible that the scattered groups of log huts, more suggestive of cattle-shelters than of villages, the sparse settlements of cabins on the border of some great nobleman's estates, can provide a population adequate to the agricultural requirements of such a vast extent of land.

Even the miserable towns, few and far between, are more suggestive of decay than of progress. The dilapidated houses grow fewer and fewer, till they finally give place to dwellings sparsely scattered amidst market gardens, beyond which lie immense melancholy plains. In summer, grass grows so high in the deserted streets that goats and sheep might browse there; the roads, in the rainy season, are full of huge puddles, in which ducks and geese contentedly disport themselves; and the appearance of a stranger, a person not belonging to the district, is an event. The boys and men stare at him apathetically as he goes his way;

whilst if by chance the sound of carriage-wheels is heard, the painted shutters, red, green, blue, and yellow, are flung back, and from behind the gaudy screens, girls and women peer forth, anxious not to lose the exceptional sight of a '*bonâ fide* traveller.'

Thus, in treating of Russia those persons speak ignorantly who include in their discourses on the 'people' a large middle class, an industrial population composed of artisans, mechanics, mill hands, skilled labour, and small shopkeepers; whilst the Russian peasant is, for the most part, the veriest Gallio as regards what may be called the 'burning questions' of the Russian citizen's day. It is in the widely scattered towns, in the universities, that we must seek the unquiet element; for, as yet, the distant peasant dreams not, in his remoteness, of the lengths to which his urban brother's philosophy goes, nor dimly divines the ends at which he aims.

So true is this, so impossible is it felt to compass the vast distances and penetrate the slumberous calm which form the somnolent kingdom of the serf, that the ardent politician acknowledges a double responsibility to manifest untiring energy and ardour, declaring it to

be incumbent on those who inhabit the great centres of civilisation to do the same.

The simple, patriarchal inhabitants of these tranquil districts all know one another. Modern civilisation, the 'modern idea,' does not trouble their profound calm and security. Here they, and their fathers before them, have lived their quiet lives, moved as the spirit dictated, and had their somnolent being. Here, too, will they be buried. They live exactly as their forefathers lived three or four centuries ago; and if now and again, some faint rumour of changes or innovation re-echoing from the distant world, comes to shock their prejudices, they shake their bearded chins incredulously, and murmur that where such things can be, the good old times are fast dying out!

In Northern Russia, the rural Communes, and in Southern Russia, the traditional Cossack Communal Autonomy, with the representative *Zemstov* (provincial assembly), secures the land to the people; and, in a purely agricultural population, the appearance of a stranger, the artisan, or the industrial, the product of towns and workshops, creates an excitement anything but flattering to the new-comer. He is viewed with mistrust, he is felt to be an intruder, and

his professions of friendliness are regarded with the utmost suspicion. He can have no abiding, legitimate interest in the soil.

It is for this reason that the Propagandists imagined in 1875 the system of colonisation, which, instead of sending out its emissaries single-handed, deputed them in groups to sow the seeds of agitation and disaffection in certain districts. It was argued that the *poselenia*, by reason of united forces, might succeed where the unit Propagandists failed utterly. These men sought to point out to the slow and sleepy peasant that, although in his '*Obscina*' (rural commune) the collective property of the land, in his '*Mir*' or '*Gromada*' (communal assembly) the Russian peasant already possesses the fundamental principles of Socialism, yet—that the present system is pre-condemned, as utterly defective in its working results.

They lay stress on the fact that industry, far from meeting with its own reward, is punished for its labours, so long as the hard-working and frugal peasant is bound by village communal laws to pay the taxes and dues of his fellow communist.

Tourguneff, in one of his ablest Nihilistic

novels, candidly tells how enthusiastic landed-proprietors, preaching Socialism to the peasants on their own estates, are at first regarded with patient pity by their dependants. The Lord (*Barin*) is 'afflicted' (*i.e.* mad) of the Almighty, they say. But when the ardent propagandist takes unto himself companion maniacs, the labourers fall on the whole party, cudgel them into submission, and hale them before the local authorities. 'A man must needs be mad,' they say, pointing at their Master, 'to speak such folly, but we would not have harmed *him*; only these pestilent fellows, seven times worse than he, we felt bound to belabour and hand over to Justice!'

Alexander II., who, in his beneficent and merciful measure for the enfranchisement of the serf, gave liberty to twenty-two millions of men, could yet only give that measure of liberty which the peasant himself could be prevailed upon to take.

No Kaiser, however clement, could emancipate a spirit that had lain dormant under the drudgery of centuries, or confer a new character upon the patient, longsuffering beings to whom he granted new liberties.

The Russian must have a master. If he

have none he will seek one, and will himself place the foot of his lord upon his neck in token of submission and fidelity. The most touching examples of personal devotion are to be met with from the peasant to the lord of the soil; and the serf who follows his master or mistress into domestic life gives his whole heart up to loyal service. His 'not to reason why,' his 'but to do and die,' unquestioning, uncomplaining, devoted, faithful. It is this submission, this faculty for worship and obedience, that makes the Russian soldier manifest unexampled patience under difficult circumstances.

During the floods at St. Petersburg many Russian soldiers have lost their lives through refusing to leave their posts; and it is on record that, when the Winter Palace was burned down, a priest who had rescued the holy vessels from the sanctuary observing a sentinel at post in the burning passage called to the man to flee, urging him to a hasty flight or it would be too late. Unmoved by his exhortation the man remained behind, uttering the one word '*Prikass*!' Duty! which to the faithful fellow included the whole situation.

A European soldier who saw his officer intoxicated would never feel the same respect for him again. The Russian, on the contrary, adjusts his superior's disordered uniform, dusts him, brushes him, and conveys him home; undresses him and lays him in his bed, as a mother might her nursling; and on the morrow is the same respectful, obedient automaton he was before, but an automaton with a heart beating beneath his uniform.

Thus, the serf, also, remains, under slightly changed conditions, much what he was. The long pedigree of toil, the century-old habit of submission, the unquestioning acceptance of the day and the hour, are his by inheritance; nor could he, even if he desired it, shake off, at the Imperial command, all the traditions and beliefs of the rude forefathers of the soil. To-day, as formerly, his sheep, his family, his saints, the fair to which he journeys, the quality of his *vodki* or his *kvass*, the passing pedlar, the question of his big boots and skin-lined caftan, the price of cattle, tallow, hemp, grain, the cloth of his touloupe—these, and such as these, be the subjects of his thoughts and talk. He is, for the most part, a mild, melancholy, passive, pathetic creature, passionately if dumbly

attached to the soil, loyal to his lord, superstitious, and deeply pious, according to his lights; calling on the name of the Czar with more of intrinsic, as more of extrinsic, awe than he manifests at that of his Creator, '*Batyushka! Gosudar!*' The Giver of all good things, the Father, the dear Lord and Sovereign Ruler, the One orthodox and only Emperor. A Being very different from that bugbear of European imagination, 'the icy-hearted Muscovite, the overgrown Barbarian of the East,' whom the British Radicals fervently believe to be 'as full of lies, as Jack on his alehouse bench,' and scarcely more sober!

In 1864 two Russian women inscribed their names, at the University of Zurich, as medical students. Switzerland is a free country under a republican form of government.

Seven years later the female students at St. Petersburg (the hereditary home of despotism) were counted by hundreds, and at Zurich by dozens. Thus we may assume that the enthusiasm which hailed the possibility of an honourable career, and the outlet which severe studies gave to the female energies, numbered hundreds of aspirants, crowding to avail themselves of the privilege in Russia, as against

dozens at Zurich, recruited from the rest of Europe, and possibly also from America.

The same spectacle of women flocking to the medical schools might have been witnessed at the Universities of Moscow, Kiev, Charkow, and Odessa. Nor were they discouraged by the fact that a doctor's degree, and liberty to practise in the medical profession, were still refused them, even though they had fairly gained their diploma. One department, perhaps the most important of all, was still open to them in virtue of the certificate thus gained; and though not all who were entitled to do so practised as *accoucheuses*, yet the professional knowledge, skilful touch, and womanly sympathies of these women-doctors made their presence, in a spirit of neighbourly kindness at many a bedside, a source of comfort, strength, and cheerfulness, in her dark hour, to many a poor woman who must have otherwise passed unaided through the throes of maternity.

On the other hand, hundreds of young women who availed themselves of the first opportunity thus offered of a liberal education, never intended to practise medicine as a profession.

They imbibed much more than was in-

cluded in the mere routine course of professional study, and they saw something of the outer world. They heard new opinions, got rid of old prejudices, formed valuable friendships, mixed in different grades of society, and, for the most part, became enthusiastic 'patriots' after their own peculiar fashion. Largely recruited from the ranks represented by the magistracy, the superior and inferior clergy, petty government officials, schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, small merchants and shopkeepers, these young women had tasted all the bitterness of spirit which dashes itself futilely against the immovable rock of narrow prejudice in small communities. Parish politics, paltry pettinesses, and the cares that arise from deficient incomes, had entered 'like iron' into their aspiring souls, and they were thus able not only to appreciate to the full, but perhaps to overestimate the advantages included in a more liberal and less 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' manner of existence.

As in all communities, amongst them the good and the bad were to be found. Some gentle women, inspired with sublime self-devotion and untiring perseverance in the noble path of unselfish duty, recall the figures

that imagination is wont to depict as circumscribed within the narrow limits of the Roman calendar of canonised saints. Others, losing sight of the lofty peaks of virtue in the excitement of the hour, and in the pursuit of the vain god of Self, sank deplorably to the depths of the unsexed woman.

A singular development—no doubt inspired in the first instance by the popular Nihilistic novels of Tchernichevski—also arose out of this new school of female progressists, without which the realisation of his ideal would have remained an unaccomplished fact.

The woman was no longer to be the painted puppet, the vapid doll, dressed for a court ball in gewgaws and spangles, treated as an irresponsible being by her husband, as a spoiled child, or beautiful fury, by her family and dependants; or—in a lower rank—presenting the depressing spectacle of a tawdry attempt at imitation of this deplorable model.

The thin veneer of French polish, so long strained at by Russian women of all classes, was no longer to suffice. The coming woman was to be the companion, the equal, the friend of the man. She must live on the proceeds of her own work; no longer the chattel of her

parents, kept in the ridiculous subjection of an irresponsible being, until she is an old woman; not able to marry because she has no fortune. She was to make her own fortune, to choose her own line of life, and to labour in it as conscientiously as though she were a man, with a family dependent on his exertions. She could give lessons, do clerkly duties, suffice to herself. She should no longer subject herself to the reproach of being an expense and a burthen to the man whom she loved. The like-minded young man and girl were to live under the same roof, on terms of equality. He to have no claims, no rights, other than she also shall enjoy. Their sitting-room was to be a neutral ground where they could both meet their friends, exchange opinions, read and talk together.

Thus the girl is supposed to 'emancipate' herself, but to no selfish ends.

To marry on inadequate means and have a large family; to see her husband a broken-down slave of the ring, her boys and girls uneducated or dependent on the unwilling bounty doled out by disgusted and impatient relatives, is no longer her ideal of happiness, nor her notion of the duty a rational human being owes to the

human family at large, as represented by 'Society.' She becomes a teacher and a preacher; she shows women that the time has come when a woman has other duties and other careers open to her besides that one mission, already over-fulfilled, of over-populating the world. She proves that there is no merit in a premature and unlovely old age, a soured temper, and an unlimited family. Strange, almost incredible as it may seem, it is yet a fact beyond dispute that many of these unions are absolutely Platonic, and of almost ideal purity. Names have again and again been cited, amongst others that of the well-known Solovief, the shopkeeper or small merchant from Saratow, who was told off to assassinate the late Emperor, and who contracted a Platonic marriage in order that the girl he loved might be at liberty to take up his work.

That done, he—with a steadiness of courage and loftiness of aim which many who give fine-sounding names to their creeds and practices might do well to emulate,—crushing all selfishness on the 'threshold of the mind,' separated himself from his wife on the very day of their wedding, and went forward on his solitary way to preach the propaganda which he firmly

believed to contain a true gospel of glad tidings to his oppressed fellow-countrymen.

And the case of Solovief is by no means an isolated one. Many of the young women to whom the university movement came as a revelation, strongly imbued with the belief that the aurora of better things was dawning upon Russia, volunteered to become pilgrims of the propaganda throughout the provinces, journeying on foot, or by such chance conveyances as might offer, from town to town, from village to village, in peasant costume, living amongst the serfs, and teaching them by conversation and by means of the printed sheets which the Nihilist press turned out in thousands, the story of their country, and the history of its people and their wrongs.

Dress and 'fashion' were at a discount; embroidery, 'fancy-work,' and all feminine idlenesses and extravagances were abolished, as unworthy of rational human beings whose time could be better employed than in the pursuit of frivolous and puerile, if harmless or only negatively reprehensible, pursuits. With the masculinely minded, costume assumed a manly character. Short hair, worn in a curly crop, spectacles, cloth jackets and linen collars,

gave the girls somewhat the air of male students, more especially as with their feminine garments too many of them laid aside a large portion of their maidenly reserve. But these examples would not be such as a propagandist with any tact would be likely to bring before the notice of the sensitive and refined; and it was by tales of exalted female heroism, of sublime self-devotion, of extraordinary courage and perseverance, that Julie de Kerezoff had captivated Bianca Martello's ardent imagination.

The opportunity originally arose out of a desultory conversation at Sprudelheim, in which Vera Zasulitch was severely condemned by all taking part in it, with the exception of Bianca, who, more out of opposition than from any real interest in, or knowledge of, the circumstances, defended the Nihilist heroine. Julie, always ready to seize and profit by the occasion, made a mental note of Bianca's tone of rebellion, and cautiously, by degrees, she ventured so far, in her eagerness for proselytes, as to say a few words of flattering confidence, which, from a lady of her age and position, seemed like the condescension of a personal confidence to the eager girl, anxious to know, to see, to hear, to live a larger life, to realise

a wider existence than seemed ever likely to be her own lot.

Tales of lovers torn asunder, and of husbands and wives separated for life; of the faithful courage of tender women setting out secretly, and on foot, to traverse hundreds of versts in the hope of being allowed to share their dear ones' labours or to soften the hardships of exile; stories of nobly born, delicately nurtured women suffering the indignity, the degradation, of the whip and the chain; their property confiscated, their children torn from them, on the mere suspicion of some political offence, as represented by a paid spy, or base informer, whose secret malignity might count at once on immunity, and on the reward of blood-money, knowing that his victim was betrayed to exile or to death.

To the Nihilist, as to the Jesuit, no one is insignificant, nothing is paltry. The meanest man may be made the instrument of the mightiest tragedy; the weak hands of women, from Biblical days downwards, have in the history of all times, and of all peoples, executed the work of the Avenger.

England, as a free country, is the ultimate refuge of political malcontents of every

nationality; and it was well, Madame de Kerezoff argued, to strengthen the English connection.

As a visitor in quiet, respectable English houses, either in town amongst the wealthy middle classes, or amidst the landed gentry, clergy, and small proprietors, a foreign lady, if her own particular, or the general interests of 'the Cause' suggested temporary expatriation, might pass many months untrammeled and unsuspected.

Then, too, there was the question of English money! Although no public appeal could be made, as in the case of plague, pestilence, and famine, for funds to meet the needs and necessities of the party of progress in Russia, yet much might be done in a quiet way; and Julie's feminine intuitions catalogued the Hudsons and the Giffords as wealthy, simple folk; whilst Fitz and the Owens were at any rate comfortably off, and probably had many wealthy friends.

So scanty were the means at the disposal of the Nihilist party, that the very house in which the mine was being bored on occasion of the 'Moscow attempt' had to be mortgaged. According to custom, a survey was made by

an expert, in presence of the *Stanovie* (town-police), and this at a time when the mine was nearly finished! '*The three "Railway attempts," all organised for the same month of November, cost, in all,*' says a Nihilist writer, '*but the pitiful sum of from* 3,000*l.* *to* 4,000*l*!'

Vera Zasulitch, as Julie explained, had no personal end to compass, no private spite to gratify. She risked the death she deemed it her duty to deal; and, when she levelled her pistol at General Trepoff, she knew that in aiming at the Governor of St. Petersburg, she put the possible halter about her own neck, whilst she recorded an act of typical vengeance.

In the same way, in the 'Hartmann attempt,' six or seven men, influential and capable members of the 'Circle,' were set aside in favour of a woman, to whom the delicate duty of waiting for the arrival of the Imperial train was assigned. She was to give the signal for the explosion at the exact moment; and to her, also, was entrusted the duty of firing the deposit of nitro-glycerine, concealed on the premises, in the event of the police coming to arrest the conspirators. Everything and everybody would be blown into the air, and Ruin

and Death baffle investigation. Yet no one suggested that she would falter in her purpose!

In a few rapid words Julie sketched the history of men like Herzen and Bakounine, tracked by the police from country to country, hunted and hounded for no crime—unless it be a crime to hold independent opinion, she said—from land to land; 10,000 silver roubles the price of Bakounine's head; his arrival in Paris, his escape to Germany, his hiding at Leipzig, his lectures at Dresden, his capture at Chemnitz, and his condemnation by Saxon court-martial; the death-sentence finally commuted to perpetual imprisonment.

She told how he was handed over by the Saxon Government to the Czar Nicholas and sent to St. Petersburg, and there imprisoned in the impregnable fortress of SS. Peter and Paul; thence transferred to Schlüsselberg, on account of the war, and finally exiled to Siberia. Here he met Julie de Kerezoff's sister [whose story was only discreetly alluded to *en passant*]; obtained leave to join a convict colonist settlement on the river Amoor, and succeeded in getting on board an American ship bound for Japan and North America. In 1861 he was in London. Ten years later, in the summer of 1872, he

died suddenly, two years after Herzen, whose *Bell* had sounded the tocsin of liberty throughout Russia, and like him was canonised by his followers and disciples as one of the 'fathers' of 'Nihilistic idea.'

It was a girl of nineteen, said Madame de Kerezoff, who, with a pistol, killed a Nihilist suspected of treachery to his order. When the students rose *en masse* at Kiev, it was again a young girl who led the demonstration. The *émeute* at St. Petersburg, in the open space before the Kasan church, was headed by two female students, and everywhere the women of Russia had shown that they were swift to avail themselves of the confidence, opportunities, and possibilities of action, conceded to them by their male associates.

'In what other country,' she asked, 'do we find educated women leading the vanguard of freedom and liberty?'

It would almost seem as though that intoxication of delight with which the Russians welcome the return of summer, found a parallel in the practical side of their paradoxical character. The warm blood of the Italians never moved Italian women to join in the work of reorganising political and social life,

or in re-conquering the liberties of a united Italy. It was true that with more than Spartan heroism, mothers had devoted their sons to the 'good Cause,' and that many an Italian matron could count her brave boys dead on the field, or shot down in horrible carnage and massacre behind walls, in streets and alleys, by the half-dozen. But there the daughters of the south stopped; here they drew the line. Men must fight and women must weep. The rest must take care of itself. There was no use to worry 'ideas.'

In Russia, as we have already seen, the latter-day propaganda is not alone confined to the Vera Zasulitchs, the Perovskaias, or the Jessie Helfmanns of the social system.

Nihilism has its recruits amongst the very highest in the land.

It is equally at home in the ball-room and the boudoir; in the courtiers of the Emperor's anteroom, and amongst the ladies of the Empress's bedchamber. The Imperial Guard is tainted with it, the personal suites of the members of the reigning family, the pages, ushers, and chamberlains of the palaces, are its instruments and its tools.

Even Herzen himself, the founder of the

Bell (*Kolokol*), was noble on the father's side, being the illegitimate son of a Russian aristocrat and a German mother, Louise Haag; of his uncles, one was a lieutenant-general and a senator, the other ambassador during the Napoleonic era at the court of King Jérome. Ogareff, his chosen ally and companion, a dandy and a fop, was also of noble birth and of ancient family, two things not always synonymous in Russia. Prince Peter Dolgorouki, his associate, in common with the rest of his family, boasts, as is well known, descent from Rurik the Varangian, the favourite hero of Russian history. The house of which Ivan Golowin was a cadet was of ancient nobility, inscribed five hundred years ago in the red book of Russian nobles as of long descent. Prince Alexander Woronzoff, the defender of Nelschageff and other Nihilists, was a cousin of the Chancellor of the Empire; and belonging to the same group, was the son of the late adjutant-general Rostozoff, who, as a correspondent of Herzen's *Kolokol*, was imprisoned in 1862, and condemned to a long period of seclusion. Bakounine, extreme and even extravagant as his opinions were, made his *début* in life as a cavalry dandy, the descen-

dant of wealthy landed proprietors of ancient Boyar family.

Documents of a compromising character were found amongst the belongings of the Countess Panine, a lady of the bedchamber, whose pedigree stands high in the Russian peerage, when the plot to blow up the Winter Palace was discovered. Rumour has more than once connected a cadet of the great house of Galitzin with Nihilistic intrigue; whilst the naval service and the Admiralty have been fully equalled, if not outstripped, in treachery by members of the War Office. The Krapotkines come of a proud stock, and a curious contrast is afforded in the family annals as exemplified in the persons of the Nihilist Prince Krapotkine, now in a French prison, who it was said was at one time driving a cab in St. Petersburg, and his kinsman, the ill-starred Prince Krapotkine, Governor of Charkoff, who died at his post, shot by a Nihilist in 1879.

The traditions of revolt connect too many great Russian names with revolution, if not with Nihilism, for the impartial chronicler to ignore the fact. The conspiracy of 1825, which resulted in the death of the poet Rylieff and his friend Bestucheff, numbered members of

many historic houses in its ranks. The Troubetskois, who had opposed Michael Romanoff's accession to the throne when the old line of the Czars came to an end, knew that the army was wholly with Prince Dimitri, their candidate for Imperial honours; but the Church was against him, and he was lucky enough to be defeated in his ambitious projects. His fellow-conspirators, Prince Odoïevski, a cornet of cavalry, and Prince Chèpine Rostofski, a captain in the Moscow regiment, came of the ancient stock of Rurik, and frankly looked down on the Romanoffs, as a sort of *parvenus*. Prince Obolenski, who was with them, was also of an old and distinguished Russian family, as were many others implicated in the plot. Prince Sergius Troubetskoi, who, in virtue of a great name, rather than for his own personal qualities, had been nominated the insurgent Dictator, crawled abjectly, on discovery of the conspiracy, from his hiding-place to Nicholas's knees, and there, cringing, craved for the pardon which he confessed his act of *lèse-majesté* did not entitle him to expect. The Emperor, it is said, looking down from the height and pride of Cæsardom at the worm writhing on the floor at his feet, replied with dignity: 'It is granted. If you

have the courage to support a dishonoured life, it is yours.' Death would, as it turned out, have been more merciful. He was carried hurriedly and secretly to Siberia, and the treatment which not only he, but his faithful and devoted wife, underwent, in that grim land of exile and dumb torture, are amongst the annals that cast a dark shade on Czar Nicholas's fame, and serve to keep alive, alike the touching traditions of woman's devotion, and the terrible tale of cruelties whose very name is a byword and a reproach amongst the nations.

No wonder if, to a young and ardent imagination, the picture of a great city, outwardly silent and as though profoundly at peace with itself, on the surface monotonous to inexpression, beneath the seemingly dead level undermined to its uttermost limits, presents a strange and overpowering attraction. Fast bound in 'chains of misery and iron,' as aspiration might seem to be, dormant or dead as the spirit of liberty might appear, a nearer scrutiny could not but convince the candid inquirer that rebellion was neither dead nor even sleeping. As the ice-bound river, rapidly flowing beneath its mirrored calm, will, at the appointed season, break loose from the restraints which for the

time hush into silence, and seem to stem the force of the flood, so the restless spirit, quelled for the moment, or stilled for a season, will, when the hour has struck, break the bonds that hemmed it in, and, rushing through self-sought channels, force its way to the level which Destiny has assigned, overpowering every obstacle in its resistless and headlong course.

In all the world, as her instructors showed to Bianca, there is no such spirit of Progress—paradoxical as the assertion may seem—as in retrograde Russia. In what other country has the passion for liberty levelled all distinctions of class and creed, and inspired delicately-nurtured women to forget the softness and ease of life in order to preach a propaganda fraught with daily and hourly peril to its instruments? Where else in Europe can you find noble ladies willing to risk honour, reputation, love, life itself to the vast End in view?

In France, the *élite* of revolutionary women may be counted on the fingers of one's right hand; in Italy, the women, as befits the descendants of the matrons of ancient Rome, have bound the shield and buckler on their men, clasped the helmet, polished the spear, and bade their sons go forth, and worthily win

the spurs their fathers already wear in their country's cause. But they have not clamoured for social reforms, given themselves over to the study of anxious problems, learned 'To scorn delights and live laborious days,' in college, lecture room, or dissecting theatre; nor painfully applied themselves to the hand-to-hand struggle of the few against the many. The noble hope of ultimately seeing the misery and degradation that crush millions of their fellow-countrymen, resolved into a fair measure of enlightened liberty, has animated the women of Russia to agitate for such measures of reform as shall entitle their country to claim her place amongst the civilised nations of the Western World.

The programme of such a propaganda, so proclaimed as to bring all its more elevated aspirations to the front, so as to hide all blots or deformities of detail, seems little less than sublime in its self-abnegation, its generous spirit, its tender sympathies. Elastic enough to stretch in every direction, this latter-day gospel may be so taught as to include within its ranks the orthodox believer and the philosophic propagandist; him to whom all creeds are equally good and equally bad, and him to whom there

is no salvation beyond the pale of his own creed. The bigoted Countess Perowsky, with her orphanages and asylums, her convents and penitentiaries, her strict religious observances and unquestioning obediences to clerical rule; the generous, enlightened, and gentle Esther Rodostamos, daughter of an oppressed and despised race, with which she had identified herself by choice, not of necessity; Julie de Kerezoff, the unimaginative, positive, practical woman of the world, despising sentiment, and yet sacrificing her whole life to the pursuit of one absorbing chimera, fearless, steadfast, and undaunted; and Bianca, with her warm Italian blood, her thirst for excitement, in contrast to the necessarily-restricted routine which she, in her contempt for the mere personal aspect of life, abhorred—all these, and endless other women of varying types, from the vestal to the Magdalen, from the enthusiast, who seeks the amelioration of 'Humanity,' to the she-tigress crouching in ambush ready to spring out when fate shall bring her victim that way, and grant the longed-for moment of supreme revenge—all these find place, occupation, and satisfaction in the Nihilist cause

Means, profession, family, occupation, life,

all must be laid on the altar of devotion. No man dare hold a wife so dear, but that he deliberately, and without hesitation, obeys the order which will make her a widow to-morrow. If it be demanded of him, he must kiss her on the lips, smile in her eyes, go out and die 'and make no sign.' No woman may let the strong and tender love that binds her to her husband weigh so much as a feather-weight in the balance, if it be deemed that in leaving him she can (be it but never so faintly) help forward the common Cause to which she is sworn. An aged father must not plead with his young daughter (her hand being already laid to the plough) to turn back; the tears and prayers of a sick or dying mother may not avail, if, by prevailing, they retard the performance of a duty which must count with her son, before every personal consideration. Brother and sister must be as strangers, unless the natural relationship be endorsed by a fraternity of which they perhaps alone shall know. And the 'familiar friend,' of whom sweet counsel may often have been taken, shall count no more than the merest stranger, should loyalty to the oaths that bind, exact a renunciation of the old affectionate bond.

Since the days of the early Christians no such all-embracing, voluntary self-sacrifice (or so the skilful propagandists teach the timid and doubting soul) has ever united a promiscuously-composed, heterogeneous band of men and women, in the common bonds of heroism and martyrdom. If it be objected that many members, or some at least, fall far below the standard implied in these exalted doctrines, the answer, mildly reproachful, recalls a passage in The Book, pointing out that not every part of the body is equally honourable; that some members are made to honour, and some to dishonour. They, in whom supervision and direction are vested, will use their instruments, it is believed, according to their lights.

The services which a noble lady, gifted with all graces of body and mind, may fitly perform, cannot be entrusted to the poor *moujik*, ignorant, ill-clothed, ill-fed. But—it is pointed out—amongst his fellows, the sordid facts of his obscure existence specially qualify him for the work that is set him to do. You are reminded of the Magdalen, afterwards favoured amongst saints, the companion of publicans and sinners, of idlers and spendthrifts; and from the narra-

tive you delight to honour, the most familiar formulæ are made to do duty, for the propaganda your preacher propounds.

Communities of men, and communities of women, have in divers times and after divers manners, suffered all things for conscience' sake; but such communities are of their very nature essentially narrow in scope, and exceptional in practice. Here, on the contrary, you have no chosen few self-elected; you have a vast multitude of human beings of different races, creeds, and complexions, princes and peasants, peers and paupers (each one useful after his kind and degree), bound together in one universal brotherhood of unspoken aspirations and silent vows.

Even at their secret meetings the individuality of the brethren remains unrevealed. Men and women with their forms shrouded in shapeless domino-like cloaks, their faces hidden behind misleading masks, nothing but the voice or the 'speech' can possibly 'bewray' them. Like the Roman *Saconé*, your neighbour is possibly the son of some princely house, probably himself the Head of that House; and, all unknown to him, his heir sits cheek by jowl beside him. The brilliant eyes that flash through the narrow slits in the mask of the lady opposite,

remind him of eyes he has seen elsewhere, although he cannot recall the locality or occasion. It is his married daughter, who believes that it would break her father's heart, could he guess to what lengths her emancipated opinions have brought her. Of those seated round that mysterious table, there are many whose relationships are close and intimate; many who believe that their nearest and dearest have no thought apart from them. Yet, by a strange irony of fate, the drama where each has his exits and his entrances, now being silently played out before their eyes, will result in a tragedy that shall include a terrible surprise.

To Bakounine, whose gigantic figure, lit by the lurid light of storm-clouds, conflagrations, the fire and flame that his eloquence was wont to kindle in its destructive energy, Nihilism meant 'negation;' the denial of religion, virtue, God. He denied the rights of inheritance, the rights of property, the social contract in its more extended sense. He confessed himself Atheist; he proclaimed the abolition of creeds, of marriage, and of the priesthood; he asserted the equality of the sexes, the liberty of the individual; he preached the death, not only of despots, but also of

popular sovereigns and constitutional monarchs. A Muscovite of Tartar name, he had served in the Imperial army, but, involved in some mysterious plot, in which Herzen was his companion, he was captured, and carried in a *tarantass* across the Oural chain to his prison in the Siberian mines. It was said that the dungeon had closed on him for life, and that rescue was impossible. He was next seen in Paris. In Germany he obtained such power that the mere mention of his name in Saxony, was received in certain classes with 'tumult of acclaim.' In a spirit of derision he accepted the title of *Roi de Saxe.* At Bâle, at Zurich, at Lausanne, at Berne, where was played out the last scene of the 'strange eventful history' of his erratic life, his was a familiar figure, and a voice ever 'potent in parliament.' He escaped, *viâ* Japan to America, where he resided for a time, and thus acquired the rights of an American citizen; the extreme men of France and Italy had declared him their delegate at the International Congress: he represented Russia by birth; Imperialism by his early career; the weavers of Lyons and the lazzaroni of Naples were his constituents; he shared the sovereignty of Saxony with the legitimate ruler, and was, in fine, 'A man so

various, that he seemed to be, Not one, but all mankind's epitome.'

Bakounine was the *pontifex maximus* of the extreme Radical party, of the Intransigents, the Terrorists, the Jacobins. He it was, who first proclaimed himself a Slav of Slavs; his cry was 'Russia for the Russians and the Russians for Russia.' He even went so far as to invite Alexander II. to place himself at the head of the Slav nations, of which, he said, Russia alone had been able to preserve her nationality, and whose mission he declared it to be to keep off the Tartars to the East and the Germans to the West. But it was reserved for M. Akasoff to give colour, form, and consistency; to popularise Bakounine's dream of a federative Slav empire, with Russia at its head, and the Slavophile cry of 'All for Russia and by Russia!'

But Alexander Herzen, whose *Bell* (*Kolokol*) became a power in the State that none could venture to ignore or deny, so far in the course of years modified his primal programme that he declined to go the whole length of Bakounine's later extravagances. Although he endorsed the doctrines of negation and annihilation—'we do not build, we demolish; we do not announce new revelations, we sweep away

old systems of lies; we do not construct, we destroy'—yet he included, amongst the readers of the *Kolokol* (a copy of which was laid every morning on the Czar's breakfast-table, though no one could say how it got there), too many humane, enlightened, and liberal men to insist on the bloodthirsty doctrines of his associate Bakounine. With both of them Mellin had, through a long course of years, been on terms of close personal intimacy. He had seen Bakounine, after his escape from Siberia, at Lausanne, and no one recognised in the German journeyman Treib, the Baron Mellin, who by Imperial permission received a passport for Homburg, whither he went for his health's sake to drink the waters. In London he had seen Herzen, though less frequently. Here he bore his own name, and it was his own ambassador who introduced him into 'Society,' and with whom he judged it prudent to be chiefly seen. Nevertheless, under 'the great Catholic dome of Bloomsbury,' many pregnant words passed between the men whose life was spent in the pursuit of one object, and who here met on neutral ground. And no one could be surprised that Baron Mellin should choose to visit, and revisit, our great national library, designated

by the guide-book as one of the sights of London.

Deutsch and Blind, Mazzini and Bakounine, Kinkel and Freiligrath, Louis Blanc, Arrivabene, Gavazzi, Gallenga, and many an European student whose name is foreign to these pages, but familiar to the late Antonio Panizzi, Italian patriot and British librarian, looked up in silent recognition as one or other of the leaders of 'the Cause,' passed by the desk where Herzen sat at work, endeavouring to beguile adverse fortune and the hours of exile in study.

It was on the occasion of this visit to London that Mellin had seen and conceived a romantic, semi-Platonic, semi-sentimental attachment to Hero Martello, years afterwards to be recognised not without emotion by him at Sprudelheim.

But the manner of his life had made love as understood by other men, a thing of mere hearsay and report. Larger interests, more impersonal aspirations had filled out his strange, varied, yet monotonous existence. The excitement, for him, lay in the consciousness of the mighty power which, silently gathering fresh forces to itself, was hourly extending its field of action, widening its sympathies, and

welding the more diverse elements into concrete shape.

Dreamy, cold, self-contained, abstracted, a political visionary, a silent seer and impassive prophet, Mellin had the patience, the faith, and the courage of his convictions. So reasonable a man would be safe to prove utterly unreasonable, should his star desert him. Love, banished sternly, as an effeminate frivolity, unworthy of the high spirit of devotion which he proudly felt beating in his every heart-throb, would be sure, if ever it found him out, to make reprisals excessive alike in kind and in degree.

To him it had seemed enough, that now and again, some beautiful vision, the remembrance of high and pure loveliness, should illumine his solitude, and remind him that worth and beauty were a possible combination. Then he would turn to his work again, patient, faithful, loyal, content to spend and be spent in the service, as he believed, of his country and his kind.

All these circumstances, and many others not here recorded, inspired Bianca with a feeling of intense, if suppressed excitement as, under charge of the Karishkins' agent, she

stepped into the *kibitka* which was to take her on the first stage of her journey towards St. Petersburg. Her romantic attachment for Mellin—to whom, could she but have known it, she was as a grain of sand on the sea-shore, (unless some faint sense of irritation at her likeness and unlikeness to her mother might count for something less than indifference)—buoyed her up with a strange hopefulness. As yet, she was so far blind to her own feelings that she did not stay to account for them; or if, now and again, the excitement and anticipation beating at her heart were a little more than she could bear patiently, and make no sign, she told herself that triumph at her escape from the trammels that had once held her in subjection, devotion to 'the Cause,' gratitude towards the friends who had reposed such generous confidence in her, and the pride born of her own conscious integrity and courage, were sufficient to account for the stir and tumult of her breast. On the occasion of her first arrival in St. Petersburg, Mellin had been absent. No one knew, or if they knew, no one said, where he was; and she had felt that it would be indiscreet to ask. Julie, who was probably thinking of everybody and everything

in the world rather than Mellin, never so much as mentioned his name. Indeed, when Bianca, after making her farewell preparation to accompany the Karishkins to the Crimea, ventured timidly to say, 'Remember me, when you see him, to Baron Mellin,' Julie had stared at her absently, as though Mellin were at the antipodes, and answered mechanically: 'Oh, yes! I will when I see him, of course.'

But now, with the whole winter before her, months of friendly perhaps even of familiar and unrestricted intercourse, a deeper initiation into the secrets of that vast organisation which was to shake the old order of things to its very centre, might, not unreasonably, be supposed to await her.

To a very young girl of Bianca's temperament, the thing, almost inevitably serves as a plea for the person. It was Mellin, an idealised impossible and utterly untrue-to-nature Mellin, that she worshipped in her adherence to 'the Cause,' of which he was the representative. And yet it would be unjust to imagine that she could dissever the two, or consciously be loyal to the one at the expense of the other.

Her priest was her religion, and her religion was her priest. To youth all things are

possible. For Bianca, it would have seemed enough, were she allowed to sit at the feet of her elected Gamaliel, be honoured with his commands and fulfil his behests.

It is, nine times out of ten, the name of a thing rather than the thing itself which alarms our prejudices or shakes our resolutions. It is possible that if the girl had been originally requested, in so many words, to listen to the doctrines of Nihilism, of annihilation, negation, and nothingness, she would have started aside, like a broken bow. But the 'enthusiasm of Humanity,' the sophistries of a softer Socialism, the vagaries of a modified Communism—which teaches, plausibly enough, that all we are, and all we have, should be spent for the good of others, rather than in the gratification of deified Self—the high and lofty ideal which loses sight of the individual, in generous ardour for the general good, and, despite disaster and death, clings to a belief in the ultimate 'serene result of all;' these were the tenets her instructors emphasised. The very words of the Testament learned at her mother's knee were skilfully applied, while philosophic freedom and dogmatic doctrine, mixed together with aptitude and

discrimination, served to keep her ardent nature at the unquestioning high level of implicit confidence and unwavering faith.

As the green copper domes and gilded crosses of St. Petersburg met her eager gaze, she felt that now, at last, the proverbial bivalve was opening before her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IVAN AND CHELANSKA.

'PUT down the book, child, and rest awhile; you must be tired.'

It was the Countess Helena Perowska who spoke.

Bianca obeyed.

The story was one of absorbing interest, full of historical characters, disguised so thinly that to anyone acquainted with the annals of St. Petersburg there could be little, if any, difficulty in raising the veil.

'One wants breathing space,' continued the Countess; 'such a picture of the condition of Society chokes me. Better the wild Tartar hordes, which a *parvenu* upstart declared man could reveal at will, by scratching the Russ, than this miserable veneer of doubtful French polish, this insupportable travesty of western morals and manners;' and, as she spoke, the

Countess rose from the low lounge upon which she had been reposing, and began to walk to and fro with restless energy, after the fashion of some caged animal, made uneasy by the presage of the coming storm.

Bianca's gaze followed her new protectress.

Although no longer in her first youth, Helena Perowska was still beautiful as a poet's ideal. Her small, well-shaped head, round rather than oval, was so delicate in contour that no one could regret its lines did not follow the classic rule. An impression of youthfulness, not to say childishness, was conveyed by this very roundness of outline, as far removed from 'fat' as is the face of a perfectly beautiful child. Her neck was long and slender, suggestive of 'race,' delicacy, and pride. Her hair, of the colour of ripened wheat, parted on the forehead, and brushed away behind her tiny, shell-like ears in rippling yellow waves, terminated in a knot, at the nape of her neck, which shone like burnished gold. Her beautiful forehead, smooth as marble, serene as that of a sculptured goddess, was innocent of puffs and frizzing, unprofaned by the abomination of the 'fringe.' Her eyebrows, level, well marked, and of a chestnut brown, surmounted eyes that,

by the peculiarity of their shape and colour, betrayed her nationality. Long, well cut, and slightly oblique as to setting, they were of the clearest and yet intensest blue, fringed by lashes as black as night. Swift, subtle, shy, shifting, a 'sudden side-glance and look-down' might—but for a nobility of demeanour which gave the lie direct to the mere suspicion—have seemed to denote a treacherous nature; one had only to look at the lips, full, rich, and breaking into curved smiles of radiant beauty and tenderness, to recognise the base injustice of the surmise. 'More than common tall,' with a nobly-modelled bust, and hands and arms which many a sculptor had endeavoured to immortalise, Helena's complexion was as brilliantly fair, smooth, and even as that of an infant. She despised all so-called 'arts of the toilette,' for her glass told her that Nature had achieved a masterpiece, and that to attempt to improve it would be to profane the Creator's handiwork. Her dress was black, slightly opened at the throat, and a large bunch of pale violets nestled in the lace about her neck, whilst a second bouquet of the same was held in place at the waist by a silver girdle of antique Russian *repoussé* work. On her right hand she wore

three hoop rings, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies; on her left, a marquise enamel, of the Empress Helena, her patron saint, supposed to contain a piece of the true cross, set in brilliants of rare water. Magnificent single stones sparkled in the lobes of her small ears like prismatic stars.

'Is it not sad,' she continues, as she pursues her walk, 'that we cannot put the history of our country into the hands of our youth, or, at any rate, into those of young Russian girls? The women of every other country in Europe may read the history of their own land with pride and satisfaction, or at least without blushes of shame, and offended modesty rising to their faces. But who could wish to reveal to an innocent being the records of tyranny and treachery, of coarse orgies and shameless sin, that pollute every page of Russian history? Even Peter, whom we call 'the Great,' was so only by comparison: in his private hours a drunken savage, with the ruffianly manners of a boor, and no more idea of conduct than an *istvochik* in his cups. What can we say of our civilisation? And how ridiculous it is on our part to pretend to stand on one platform with other nations, when we are

obliged to confess these facts! Peter the Great, who went to bed with his boots on, drank and boxed with English ruffians, made every European palace uninhabitable for years after his occupation; who murdered his son, flogged the women he pretended to love, cheated them of their money, and whose pleasure it was, when illness kept him within doors, to make wretched peasants, men and women, drunk, then shoot them in sledges down "*montagnes Russes*," made for the purpose, and had them beaten to death if they fell out of the sledges in their descent; who ordered sledge races with the *traîneaux* packed so close together that they got entangled in the swiftness of their career, and clapped his hands with shouts of laughter at the sight of the poor wretches with broken legs and arms being carried away shrieking in agony to prison-hospitals. And this, at a time when the Pompadours, the Ninons de l'Enclos, the Montespans, and the Maintenons of the world, were curious as to rare editions, collected pictures and engravings, china and cabinets, and whose very lackeys had more manners than this royal ruffian!'

'And yet,' Bianca said, 'not only Peter, but

Catherine, was called "Great"—the "Semiramis of the North," I have read somewhere.'

'Catherine, whom, as you say, we also designate the "Great," was a modern Messalina. Have you ever read the letters and memoirs of the Margravine of Bayreuth, sister to little Frederick the Grandiose, who reigned over the province of Prussia, and set all Europe by the ears? If so, you will know how she was regarded, even by contemporaries, of her own rank; for the Empress Maria Theresa, who, we must concede, was a truly great woman, employs the same epithets as does the Margravine in writing her opinion of Catherine to Marie Antoinette. But no! Your mother would take care that you should only learn as much of these things as education demands, and Society expects. Turn which page we will, my dear, of Russian life, at Court, in Society, it is always the same unvarying story, repeated with a thousand variations. If you want virtue you must leave the Court, avoid Society, and seek it in the hut of the peasant, on the lonely steppes, in the lives of the sons and daughters of toil, in the traditions and songs of the people!'

'Did you know the author of this book?' asked Bianca, holding up the volume of

Tchernichevski's from which she had been reading aloud in a German edition, and which formed the text for the Countess Perowsky's remarks.

'No; but I know of him. His novels "made an epoch," as the Germans express it, in the social history of Russia. Girls saved their pocket-money to buy them, and carried them about secretly in their pockets; young men met daily to peruse and discuss their merits and meaning. His heroines formed a new standard of morality, and young women strove to model themselves after his pattern.

'You speak, Madame, in the past tense, as though he were dead; what was the end of his fame?'

'Ah! you ask me a question to which there is no answer. Who knows whether he is dead or alive? No one. At least, no one I have ever asked has been able to give me any positive answer. The end, so far as it is known, was this: Persecuted for his opinions, he was ordered to abstain from publishing for the future; his works were burned by the public executioner in the open market-place; he was condemned to two years' fortress; and, incredible though it seems, at the end of those two years

he was brought out of his prison and pilloried in one of our chief public squares. The public hangman read his sentence aloud as a warning to the spectators; he was taken thence to Siberia, where he was to pass fourteen years in hard labour at the mines, and undergo perpetual exile should he outlive the term of his penal servitude. A sword was then broken over his head; and from that hour to this Tchernichevski has been dead to the world. That is how Russia treats her men of genius!'

'It is incredible!'

'Yes, it is incredible, but it is true. Imagine a French man of letters pilloried on the *Place de la Concorde*, or an Englishman at Charing Cross!'

'That was done to Daniel Defoe, and for his political opinions, too,' said Bianca, furbishing up her little bit of schoolgirl history to show that she was equal to the occasion.

'Yes, but when? Not yesterday, last week, last year,' replied the Countess, to whom the name of Defoe was perfectly familiar, his immortal 'Robinson' being as popular in every Continental country as it is in our own. 'All the Youth of Russia rose to obtain Tchernichevski's pardon; but they only ex-

posed themselves to danger, and obtained no mitigation of his sentence. Last year I heard that he was alive; but who shall say? Such wonderful whispers are wafted to us across the plains that spread distance between St. Petersburg and the mines, that the air is literally charged with a thousand mysterious echoes. Doubtless, if only we had eyes to see—the eyes of faith—we, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, should discern hosts of heavenly visitants who, speeding over land and sea at their Master's bidding, are yet invisible, "because of the hardness of our hearts," to our gross material senses.'

She stood a moment rapt, visionary, and lifted above the surroundings of the moment. Were her thoughts at Katchaloff, with the past, or projected like long evening shadows into that far future which was to avenge the Egeria of Semonow?

Bianca sat silent, afraid to disturb the course of the lady's thoughts.

But suddenly she appeared to shake them off, passing her hand swiftly across her dreamy eyes, as though to dispel the vision visible only to herself. 'What can one say?' she cried bitterly; 'it is always the same story.

Tchernichevski yesterday, Tourguénieff to-morrow! Pouschkin was only saved by counterfeiting the renegade; Rylieff expiated his poetry and patriotism by death. It is a long procession of political martyrs. A rising; a rebellion; an example made of the more signal offenders; parties of twelve, sixteen, twenty executed; a dozen or two exiled; more condemned to perpetual penal servitude, and the grim farce begins *de novo*, according to time and circumstance. If you only stay with us long enough you will see your own English newspapers arrive with pictures and letter-press torn out by order of the authorities. I can show you numbers of your magazines mutilated; and some of my friends keep these as curiosities, that later generations may realise how far our so-called liberty of the Press really went!'

'And the Czar—does he say nothing?' asked Bianca, little dreaming of the dangerous ground on which she is treading.

'Ah! the Czar—is the Czar! You ask too much, my good little girl. That very word sounds ill in Imperial ears. Do you know—but how should you?—yet it is a fact that foreign journals (I say nothing of our own)

have used the word with such ironical inflections, with so much obloquy and opprobrium, that it is an offence to pronounce it. Since Peter the Great, who sought to Europeanise us, we have owned to no more Czars; it wounds our Emperor to hear himself so designated, since it implies covertly the barbarism of the Tartar, which the modern Russian strenuously denies. But you asked me what the Emperor says to these things? What he says does not much matter, for the orthodox Russian would as soon question the decrees of Providence as criticise his Emperor.'

'An excellent and loyal formula! May I come in?' asked a voice at the door, upon the threshold of which stood a groom of the chambers, whose advent, in her eloquent preoccupation, the Countess had not remarked.

For a moment the lady glanced uneasily at the servant, then her face cleared. 'My good Ivan, I did not hear you,' and looking past him for the speaker in the anteroom, she advanced with her hand outstretched in welcome. 'Enter, and all good spirits greet those who cross my threshold in friendship,' she cried, in her silvery, flute-like tones.

The words might have been a mere formula

or a gracious inspiration of hospitality; they might mean more and other things than was obvious, or they might be a customary mode of address, for aught Bianca could tell. She too had risen, and come a step or two nearer the door.

Old Ivan, faithful as a dog is faithful, faithful by instinct and by inheritance, had not stolen a march upon them. Whatever he might have overheard, it was as safe with him as it would have been with a four-footed friend. No police-spy would have risked his reputation by an attempt to tap old Ivan. *Vodki* never loosened his tongue, nor caused it to wag idly on his employers' affairs. He came from Semonow, whither the Countess Helena had been taken for her honeymoon, and whence she had disappeared to be heard of again at Katchaloff. He had marshalled all the serfs on the estate in procession to receive the bridal pair; he had had the arrangement of the apartments, the superintendence of the household, and he probably fully understood the position of affairs when he saw his young master leading a rough lonely life in spite of his marriage. Only one thing the old

man could not understand. He, who had been the faithful body-servant of the old Count, had left holy Russia to follow him in his travels over the godless continent of Europe, had dandled the young Count in his arms, had no conception of criticising his lord or his lady. When Helena returned, and resumed her position as mistress because she was his master's wife, Ivan's mouth was closed, his mind satisfied, his obedience to his lady, as implicit and unquestioning as to his lord. She was there. The past was nothing, the present everything. It was no one's business to question or argue; it was the business of everyone to obey; and criticism amongst his fellows, was a thing not for a moment to be tolerated. He silenced it at once, and set an eloquent example of duty by his dumb persistence in faithful service. The Countess, used as she was to obedience, had a spirit too finely touched to delicate issues, not to be fully aware of the difference between eye-service and heart-service; and thus, aware that she had, on the present occasion, been guilty of imprudence, and that her tone had been too loud, as she looked at Ivan a sense of security sent a sudden ray as of

sunshine across her face, and the smile that accompanied her few words seemed to the old man like a benediction. He went out, and along the corridor, crossing himself and invoking blessings on the house, the family, and their friends.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HIDDEN ENMITY.

It was Esther Rodostamos who thus gaily asked permission to enter, and as she advanced into the room, still talking, she did not at once see Bianca. The early twilight, which had long since fallen, had caused Bianca to lay her book aside, and the modicum of day that still struggled through the tall double windows only served to show the more conspicuous objects in the apartment. It was a question of navigating the sofas and tables, steering clear of couches and cabinets, to a cosy little settlement near the stove. Tall spiral plants, immense india-rubber trees, ferns and feathery vegetation, stood out against the dim grey background, in superb Oriental pots; a small table covered with work and gay-coloured silks occupied the foreground; a dwarf, revolving bookstand, well filled with standard works, as well as with the more ephemeral literature of

the day, was within reach, whilst the scent of flowers which filled the china bowls on the tables seemed all the more powerful because in the twilight the blossoms were invisible. On the shelf of the white porcelain *Berliner-Ofen* stood four rare antique silver candlesticks, a silver incense-burner, and an enamelled *bonbonnière*, said to have been sent by Marie Antoinette as an offering to the Empress Catherine, and containing an exquisite likeness of the ill-fated heroine of *le petit Trianon*, in the costume of a Versailles milkmaid, by Madame Vigée le Brun, whose long sojourn in Russia had made her name familiar in St. Petersburg; whilst high above the architrave of the door leading into the Countess's bedroom hung the lamp illuminating the inevitable *Ikon*.

'I call this delightful,' Esther exclaimed gaily, as she sat down and threw aside the enormous pelisse, which she apologised for not having left in the ante-room. 'The fact is my impatience outstripped my discretion, and I followed so fast on Ivan's heels that there was no time to make *antichambre*. There are days—I wonder whether it is so with everybody—when I feel as though the pied piper of Hamelin were scraping away at

his mad jig, and making my feet almost dance out of their shoes. It is as though "the tarantula had bitten me," and I am so afraid of playing the part of an involuntary Herodias, that I dare take no delight in my mirth. My good, superstitious Fest, when I complain to her of my inconvenient exuberance, shakes her head, just as my old nurse used to do when I was a child, when I was too merry betimes. "You will laugh on the wrong side of your face before night," the old woman would say, and I am bound to confess that I generally did. I hope, Countess, you can imagine, even if you have no experience of it in your own person, something of the insensate spirit of folly I describe, for unless sympathy pleads my cause I can scarcely expect to be excused;' and as she spoke Esther lightly touched Helena Perowska's hand, as though to deprecate her judgment, and to bespeak indulgence for her exuberant cheerfulness.

'Indeed, you committed no indiscretion, and so there is nothing to forgive; if there were, you are one of those, I fancy, who can know nothing of forgiveness, for you never offend. For the rest, it does one good to hear anyone in these melancholy days of morbid introspec-

tion, self-torture, self-analysis, freely, frankly, unfeignedly gay. Personally, I have no experience of that mercurial temper which you describe. I fancy it is chiefly attributable to constitutional temperament, like the rest of our idiosyncrasies ; but even had it been mine, by the inalienable right of inheritance, the circumstances of my life have not been such as to develop or preserve the jocund faculty. Indeed, we were getting far too serious, and you came most opportunely by the brightness of your mood to dispel my owl-like gloom. Ah! the room is so dark; you did not see that Mdlle. Martello is with me. We have been reading aloud; and—somehow—the book depressed us, and my harangue grew out of the suggested circumstances. *Martellina mia* ! be so good as to light those candles. I like to see friendly faces ; and let us have some tea.'

The Countess, with easy tact, brought Bianca into the conversation, knowing that her *protégée* and Esther had met frequently before this evening, and suspecting nothing of Bianca's mood. Esther, in the friendliness of her feelings, at once rose, and as Bianca crossed the rug at her feet to light the candles, would have shaken hands with the young English girl—

indeed, had half advanced her own, in concession to British custom. But Bianca drew back, made a slight yet ceremonious curtsey, and passed on, returning in a moment with the candlesticks in her hands. She placed them on the work-table, and seemed about to withdraw, when Ivan, followed by a younger servant, brought in the cheerful *samovar*. A little pause ensued in the conversation, during which the servants arranged the tea equipage. Bordeaux, and lemon in slices, instead of cream, was served with the tea.

To Bianca, when they were alone, the rare china and fine old silver, the *samovar* hissing on its bed of glowing coals, the bright, polished tray, the aromatic scent of the 'Caravan tea,' the perfume of the freshly-cut lemons, the cheering influence of the social cup, made a delicate little festival that almost supplied the place of a good blazing English fire. The cheerless inhospitality of the cold and apparently fireless porcelain stove, like a huge monument transplanted from the nearest cemetery, looming ghostlike and comfortless through the darkness, was pleasantly modified by this independent arrangement of the hissing urn on its polished brazen basket; and it

had come to be her duty to dispense the tea, the Countess enjoying the immunity from espionage implied by the absence of the *valetaille* as she chatted with her intimates. Esther, on the young girl's haughty rejection of her proffered hand, withdrew, and, blushing crimson, relapsed once more into her corner of the couch.

She had, through circumstances, come to be on terms of close friendship with the beautiful Countess Perowsky; they were both indefatigable in their works of charity, and a mutual attraction had ripened into esteem —something of a warmer character than mere personal admiration. When Julie de Kerezoff, with some impatience, announced to her friend that the eccentric young English girl whom she had placed so advantageously with the Princess Paul Karishkin was returned upon her hands again, for no reason that she could understand, other than an obstinate whim and caprice of the young lady's own inception, Esther Rodostamos had relieved the irritable, anxious little woman by proposing that Bianca should become a member of her own household. 'If you only knew how I hate writing,' she said, holding up a pretty little ink-stained digit, 'how I weary of, and rebel against, the enforced

hours of mechanical labour, you would understand that I should value the services of your young friend.'

'Take a secretary trained to the business,' replied the practical Julie, drily. 'You can afford it.'

'What! and exercise dear old Fest's timid soul with doubts and fears too intricate and too acute to be borne? No; the "proprieties" must be observed.'

'She cannot write Russian.'

'What matter? French and German would, nine times out of ten, answer the purpose. The work is just of a nature I could not well employ a man to do—orphanages, penitentiaries, foundling hospitals, refuges, reformatories, and all for girls and women. Ah! and so many other matters of business, where it would be an advantage to have a person ignorant of certain shibboleths.'

'Stop,' said Julie, 'there you are mistaken. One shibboleth—the one you mean—she knows.'

'Impossible!'

'True!'

'But how?'

'Ah, my dear! the how, when, and where

are not for now. Enough that she knows. Otherwise I would not have sent her to Princess Paul, nor should I trouble myself about her now.'

But finally the Countess Perowsky persuaded Esther to forego her prior claim, and on reflection it seemed to her wiser not to introduce an element of discord into her peaceful household. Dear old Fräulein Fest's feeling would be hurt if a younger than herself, a more useful and companionable inmate, should share all Esther's pursuits, and act as her amanuensis and confidante. Thus the younger lady ceded Bianca to her friend, and it struck her forcibly to-night that she had done well in arriving at that conclusion.

What possible reason could Mdlle. Martello have for her act of rudeness? In their relative positions, the ill-breeding of a paid dependant might have seemed a very insignificant matter to many of Esther's station; but her sweet spontaneous nature was hurt by the rebuff. She questioned herself severely as to whether she had pained or offended Bianca in any way, and the brightness of her spirit was quenched in the annoyance she felt at being obliged to suffer ignorantly for a fault of

which, in intention at least, she was guiltless.

She turned to the Countess.

'I said this was delightful, and I think it really is the best hour of the twenty-four. After I have been busy all day, sitting in our hot rooms, I feel such a sense of schoolgirl liberty and freedom when I call for my fur, get into the sledge, and am whirled over the snow through the dusk to the bright houses of my friends.'

'What does Fräulein Fest say to the proprieties?'

'Well, rheumatism, or the holy horror of it, keeps her timely wise and most agreeably silent. For one thing, my sledge is so small and so peculiar that I fancy everybody knows it; for another, my shadow, my double, my body-guard, never leaves me. Where I go Rachel Hanska follows. If I send her away she stands on the bar of the sledge at the back, or crouches down so that I may not see her, or crawls on to the transverse beam. Fancy what a fashionable appearance my equipage would make on the Perspectives! Fortunately it is too dark for her vagaries to be observed, or, if I discover them, I send for

a larger sleigh. It is good to be loved, though but by a Polish peasant woman, and I have not the heart to wound her by ordering her away. In the daytime dear old Fest is always with me; and then "*Chelanska*," as I used to call her when a child, is pacified.'

To-day had been one of those days when Esther had especially felt the need of movement and the refreshment of younger society than she found in her own house. She had with pleasure recognised Graham as an old Roman acquaintance, in whose studio she and her father had spent many pleasant hours during their last Italian winter. Graham had persuaded the lovely young Greek to let him take her portrait, and he had chosen for her the costume and attitude of Iphigenia when, in compliance with her father, she dedicates her life a willing victim to propitiate the wrathful gods.

Styro Rodostamos, already ill, had left Rome somewhat suddenly at last, fearing the too great heat of an early summer, and Graham had lost all sight, all knowledge of Esther, until he met her again on that memorable day, driving homewards at sunset through the balmy spring evening from Peterhof.

Lord Dovedale had questioned Graham

eagerly as to his previous knowledge of Esther, and hearing the history of the unaccomplished portrait, had pressed him to look it out, and beg the favour of renewed sittings.

At first Graham refused. He was too busy presenting his credentials, and was too anxiously awaiting the 'Open Sesame' of men in authority that should reveal the hidden art-treasures of Moscow and St. Petersburg, to be willing to attend to any private matters. But presently, opportunity offering, the old friendship was renewed, the old portrait discovered, and a new study commenced. Lord Dovedale was enchanted. He went from Esther's side to Graham's canvas, from Graham to Fräulein Fest; he suggested, criticised, exclaimed, objected, until Graham almost lost his temper, and Esther got heartily sick of the whole affair, and fervently repented ever having acquiesced in the arrangement.

Deep down, a double-dyed plot, in the innermost depths of Lord Dovedale's simple soul, lay the daring design of securing, by hook or by crook (though not even the most rudimentary of these instruments of infallible repute had as yet made itself familiar to his exercised imagination), by threats, promises,

entreaties, if not possession, at least the loan of this enchanting canvas. With it he would fly to England, and at the sight of so much, such rare and radiant loveliness, the soul of his old reprobate father would be softened, and he would let the future Marquis of Matlock go to fetch home the bride of his choice.

Two things were necessary to the realisation of this bold design—the consent of the lady herself, and Graham's willingness to part with his *chef d'œuvre.* As an artist—professionally, —as a man willing to take so much coin, in exchange for so much painted canvas, Lord Dovedale did not know Graham; and friendship having hitherto been the only bond between them, he found it difficult to approach him in the new character of the modern Mæcenas. But, as the enthusiastic lover told himself, difficulty he had always known to be there; difficulty should only sharpen his wits and his determination; difficulty overcome would sweeten the combat, and flavour the result when the end should crown the work.

Of this design Esther had naturally no suspicion. The serious illness of the Marquis of Matlock had called his son to England. Graham had been away, in the interior of the

country; thus the picture had made but slow progress, and sittings had still to be conceded.

Esther flattered herself that her positive refusal to entertain Lord Dovedale's suit would be effectual where her rejection of Lord George Peveril had proved futile. There was no pretty provoking proffer of sisterly regard or sympathetic friendship on her part. He asked her to be his wife and she declined. When he asked Why, she refused to listen.

'There is no "why," my lord, other than "because"' she said, 'there can be no reason why I, who rejected Lord George Peveril, should love Lord Dovedale. Let us forget this folly. My answer will always be the same; or rather I should say, "would be," for I trust you will never mention the matter again.'

'I will mention it when I think I am justified in doing so, and I will not allow you to call my love "folly." No one could know, better than I, the difference between us.'

'That I am a Jewess, you mean?'

'That was not what I meant, and you know it was not. Neither is it strictly true. You bear your father's name.'

'Yes, but my mother's blood is in my veins.'

'Granted; but you have not been educated in that faith.'

'Excuse me, my lord, it is not a question of creed, but of race; and the question of race I hold to be, nine times out of ten, more serious than that of creed.'

'Then you would not have a Frenchman marry an English woman, or *vice versâ*?'

'That is different. Though I will go so far as to say that I hope Frenchmen are not like what their own novelists make them. Still, Europeans have a certain family likeness. When you come to Asia, Africa, and aboriginal America, the question is a more serious one.'

'You choose to make it so, for the perverse pleasure of proving your postulate, which in itself I do not admit.'

'I am wrong to argue,—that I allow,' Esther answered, dropping her tone of banter, 'because argument presupposes a possibility of conviction. Now I know that I do not love you, and that I cannot love you, as the honest woman should love the honest man who honours her by choosing her out of all the world to be his wife, and *No*, means *No*, with me.'

'You shall not rob me of my hope.'

'I am sorry to hear you say so, my lord.

When a woman tells a man honestly such a painful truth as I have felt myself obliged to tell you, she does not like to hear that her candour and her sufferings have been in vain. I may go further, and say that, attentions or love forced upon an unwilling recipient, are destructive of friendship, and tend to rouse opposition and angry feelings, rather than to encourage tender ones.'

'I will never "force my attentions" upon you, Esther.'

'And please not to call me Esther, Lord Dovedale.'

'I call you Esther in my mind, always; but I will try not to offend verbally in that direction again.'

And, invincibly good-natured, Lord Dovedale, withdrew. He told the story of his love to Graham, who laughed at him.

'Do you know that Esther Rodostamos is a Jewess?' he asked.

'And you, too, you brute,' said Lord Dovedale, half angry, half laughing. 'I thought travel, and modern culture, had dispelled all these mouldy superstitions, and old-world cobwebs from your unprejudiced brain.'

'Granted. But there is the family tree of

the Peverils to be considered. A Marchioness of Matlock ought to display as proud a maiden-pedigree as that of her future lord.'

'I won't answer that here, because I know it to be banter. All I ask you is to look round and tell me where in Europe the prejudice, if it still exist, has not been broken through again and again? Look at Thistledown' (a youthful peer who had been Lord George Peveril's chum at Eton). 'Has he not just married a Jewess? Not only, as in Esther's case, a woman with a Jewish mother, but a Hebrew of the Hebrews, following the religion of her fathers, and exacting that the knot should be initially tied in the Synagogue, and secondarily in the Established Church. And do you suppose he will lose a single friend, or forfeit a single honour, by reason of his marriage? Will not English "Society" flatter, criticise, fawn, abuse, cringe, and consort with the young pair, as convenience, self-interest, mammon-worship, rank-worship, selfishness, curiosity, or kindliness may suggest?'

'What a cynic!'

'I am no cynic, unless common sense be cynicism. The Rothschilds are public property, and one may speak of them without hesitation,

without the necessity of disguising their names under a thin *alias*. Look at them, in all their branches; married to French Catholics, English Protestants, Irish Ultramontanes, Italian Papists, Greek Iconoclasts. There is scarcely a religion or a sect into which this typical Jewish family has not married.'

'Because they *are* the Rothschilds!'

'You mean because they are phenomenally, abnormally, repulsively rich—because who says Rothschilds means millions?'

'I suppose that.'

'Where is your argument if that be so? What a *parvenu* estimate! what a snobbish, contemptible standard! You object to certain people on account of their race and their religion; or of the one, or of the other: and then, because certain individuals are wealthy, not only is the pill of race and creed gilded, it ceases to be a pill; it becomes a sugar-plum; it is swallowed with complacency, rolled round the palate with peptic pride, and all shudderings and grimacings over the bolus disappear so soon as poverty ceases to be an ingredient! Give me your good plain bigot, rather than such bare-faced, mercenary Mammon-worship as that!'

'The way of the world! I acknowledge

every word you say to be truth. We pretend to hate and despise Jews, yet we are not too proud to take Jewish money. We show a cupidity far in excess of theirs, and sin in the very particular which we score to them as a crime. But, if you cannot get the lady's consent, why trouble yourself as to what possible cavillers might say? No one, and I as an artist speak confidently on this point, could possibly connect Esther Rodostamos' personality with the Hebrew race. She is of the purest Greek type, and I believe on the father's side of untainted Hellenic descent, not of a mixed Levantine race. Her Quixotism alone has betrayed the history of her birth (on the mother's side), and I regard that, like so many other youthful exaggerations, as a mere amiable extravagance which time will cure.'

'And yet I love her for it; I even go so far as to say I would not have it otherwise. She associates herself with a poor and despised race, not because her name, face, or speech bewray her, but of generous impulse; because there would be, she thinks, a tacit cowardice, meanness, disloyalty in ignoring the fact of her mother's people. This is the key-note to her character. It is not only the obvious good

deeds that come in her way which she does; that would suffice to one of ordinary disposition, but not to hers. And yet there is nothing gloomy, or melancholy, or morbid in her *cultus* for the sorrowful, sick, and needy. A brighter, happier, if I may say so, wholesomer, soul never existed.'

'And from that point of view none more suited to you; but there are other considerations, as we have already agreed.'

'None that could weigh with me but want of love. And yet, her very frankness has endeared her to me beyond expression. I asked her to be my wife. The commonplace young lady, if she had felt unable to comply, would have proposed to be my sister. Esther did nothing of the kind. She even told me that my persistence would endanger our friendship; that it exasperated and annoyed her.'

'And you?

'It goes without saying, shall persevere. If, when I was a poor younger son, an obscure stupid fellow, pushed by influence into a nominal position, and endured by Lord Adamant for the sake of old "Mohawk" days spent in my father's company, the dread that I might be accused of trying to patch my poor

fortunes with the heiress's money, could not frighten me away from her, nothing shall do so now. She is bright, beautiful, accomplished, and exquisitely womanly; her hand is stretched out in help and sympathy to all who are in need; and, without professing any special dogma, she has a pure and reverent soul, and thinks—as I wish more of us thought—much of the obligation and duties of the practical side of Christianity. If I hope to marry her in the end, it is because I have faith in sympathy, begotten of honesty, truthfulness, love of one's neighbour, and a not too elaborate self-worship.'

Graham's society was specially pleasing to Esther. Endless talks of the old Roman days beguiled the weariness of the 'sittings.' It was an understood thing that the lady of the house should be 'at home' to her intimates, and that Graham must put up with many interruptions if he persistently held to his original plan. Only one point he reserved. He stipulated that no one should see his canvas until he voluntarily accorded permission.

Thus, when he had accomplished his daily routine task in the matter of the Government catalogues, it became a sort of accepted thing that he should look in and inquire whether the

'gracious lady' were disposed to pose? A message would beg him to enter; he would find a coterie of friends and be drawn into the vortex of social chat, to the utter oblivion of both portrait and painting. Or he would get a quiet sitting, such as he loved, with Fräulein Fest, and her friendly knitting needles and nods in the background, and Esther, in a quiet mood, book in hand, ready to talk or be silent; even sometimes, when the exigencies of the portrait permitted it, to read aloud passages that specially interested her. She was in herself, apart from her rare and exquisite beauty, a most fascinating study to Graham, and he supplied the flint against which the steel of her bright wit struck forth sparks of bewildering brilliancy.

With her, all was spontaneous, joyous, natural. The artificial grace, the gift of refined repartee which many a beautiful woman learns to cultivate, in a world where it behoves those who would play a part unscathed, to be armed *de cap en pied*, suffered by comparison with the bright but harmless spirit, that tipped Esther's conversational darts. No one felt this more than the Countess Perowsky. 'I am laboured, dull, and artificial,' she would say with

a sigh. 'If I please it is by an effort; but you seem to care no more than a fawn in the woods, or an eaglet on the mountains, whether men and women admire you or not.'

'And yet—for their love—I care a great deal; and often wish I could be sure that the interest I feel in them, others return. There are special reasons in my case, you know, why I should doubt.'

The Countess made no answer. Her mind had wandered away from mere personal talk to graver problems.

She had been distinctly ordered by the recognised Head of their organisation to put forth all her fascinations, if by that means she might win a doubtful spirit to firm profession. Her irregular beauty, noble figure, and brilliant colouring were harmonised by singular softness and womanliness of bearing. The feminine essence formed an atmosphere round her which none could enter unawares, or remain long unconscious of having entered. Princess Paul Karishkin might serve to represent the type of the 'great lady'—kind, indolent, ignorant, and well-meaning. Esther's enthusiasm might repel some and annoy others. She was so unconscious, so absolutely and utterly and entirely

unoccupied with herself, that it was difficult for her admirers to pay her a compliment without feeling that they had wasted their choice flowers of speech.

A person who talks of things, and of preference avoids all personalities, whether flattering or otherwise, is not always the easiest 'to get on with.' But one like Helena Perowska, at once a great lady and a woman of exceptional gifts, endowed with tact and insight, what could she not do?

'To her who has been the chosen Egeria of a Cæsar, all things are possible,' said her Director. The tone of the world they both lived in robbed the allusion of all offence. There could be nothing but glory and fame, certainly nothing resembling infamy, in the suggested relationship.

And significant of that world was also the fact that none of these women knew how far her fellows were initiated into the mysteries which formed the bond of their secret sisterhood. A recognised divisional head they had, but he was only one of a council of three, to whom everything was finally referred; so that, in the last resort, a decree arrived at by the unanimous consent of all members, and apparently ac-

cepted by the three, two of whom remained unknown, might be reversed at the eleventh hour, or put back upon the list for further consideration if the triumvirate so willed.

Esther's enormous wealth and unfettered condition made her a big prize. Her father had stood well at Court, for financial reasons already explained, and she had her right of ingress and egress by special desire and permission of certain members of the Imperial family. She had been caught on the side of philanthropy and humanity. All benevolent measures, liberal reforms, enlightened institutions, the amelioration of the condition of the poor, universal education, sanitary measures, and so on, found in her an enthusiastic and substantial supporter. Of the cry for destruction, of the text of negation, of the darker and more terrible designs attributed to a section of her brethren she knew nothing; and, truth to tell, she secretly rebelled against the vexatious exactions of the Society, as, for other reasons, did poor Sergius Kerezoff, sick at heart of the hard service exacted by his wife in the name of the secret Brotherhood.

Graham and Lord Matlock were outside of all this, and probably would, like true English-

men, have treated any account of it with ridicule.

Bianca, whose occupation as a possible money-agent seemed for the moment gone, began to feel the depressing effects of starved enthusiasm. She was contented with her position in many ways, and felt that the Countess was a woman with whom it was impossible to associate intimately and to remain unpledged. Of the story of Helena's life, of the desertion of the Czar, and the crumbling of that worthless fabric whose base had been weakness, self, feebleness of purpose, and instability of character, she knew absolutely nothing. And it may be doubted if Esther knew more. 'Nine days,' in spite of variation of sunset and sunrise, are as long, or as short, in Russia as elsewhere. Helena had arisen from the dust and ashes of destruction like some fair fabric, statelier, grander, more perfect than before; she ruled, the mistress of a devoted household, the wife of a respectful husband, the centre of an admiring social circle; and if beneath her suave and gracious manner, her gentle calm, her winning voice and ways, a sterner purpose lurked, who could trouble himself to rake up old stories, resuscitate old memories in order to give a

semblance of purpose to the transient tone, the kindling glance which now and again transformed the beautiful face into a momentary likeness of the Medusa?

To Esther Rodostamos, it was for once a positive relief when Lord Matlock and Mr. Graham were announced. Bianca's hostile attitude had fairly baffled and annoyed her; yet it was only when, a little later, Count Perowsky entered, bringing Mellin with him, that she fairly recovered her flow of spirits, and entered fully into the pleasant rattle of the moment.

Graham and Bianca had met frequently, but seemed to prefer that the bond of compatriotism should be ignored. An angry doubt, dismissed almost as soon as recognised, had flashed across the girl's mind. Had he been sent to spy? But the theory would not hold water. Graham was ostensibly the merest acquaintance, and she knew her mother well enough to be certain that reserve would render all discussion of delicate personal matters with a stranger impossible. Nevertheless, she determined that he should know as little as might be of herself, her thoughts and feelings,

so that, if he were tempted to report upon her, the means should be wanting.

The Countess finding that they were acquaintances as well as compatriots, invited Graham to dinner, and placed him next Bianca. Unfortunately, Bianca's determination to give him no information made her as rude as a fanciful suspicious girl of her age can be.

Lord Dovedale sat next the hostess, and Count Perowsky had appropriated Esther, on the other side of whom sat Mellin and Fräulein Fest.

A silence on her companion's part caused Bianca to turn and look at him. His eyes were fixed on Esther.

'She is very beautiful,' said Bianca, following his glance.

Graham coloured slightly; then answered quietly:—

'She is; and as amiable and good as she is lovely.'

The *quid pro quo* sent the colour flaming into Bianca's pale cheeks.

'So Baron Mellin seems to think,' she replied, a fierce pang shooting through her sore and rebellious heart. What torture can be worse than jealousy?

In truth, Mellin was as indifferent to Esther as Graham was. But Bianca's distorted vision saw everything by the light of foregone conclusions. The jealousy that lay at the root of the matter, and sharpened her pain, made even the sound of her own words a relief to her ruffled feelings.

Again and again she had heard Esther's praises sung by Graham, by Lord Dovedale, by the Countess, by all the idlers and triflers to whom anyone and everyone is fair game. The Countess declared that the heiress's admirers name was Legion, and that they came to *her* for consolation by the score. She was 'not the rose, but she lived near it.' Not a week ago she alleged she had laughingly dismissed one of the more seriously wounded of these 'melancholy Jacques'' with the admonition to talk less and to try more, if forgetfulness of the hard-hearted beauty were his aim.

'*En pensant qu'il faut qu'on oublie, on s'en souvient*!' were her last words to the love-lorn gentleman.

But to Bianca she had enlarged, after his departure, on the text.

'Even Mellin, who is fire-proof,' she said, 'is amongst the smitten, if not the slain; and

the beauty of it is, Esther suspects the truth no more than she dreams of leading my Japanese pug captive.'

As Mellin, attracted by that animal magnetism which draws our eyes in the direction of those fixed upon us, caught, across the fruit and flowers, a glimpse of Bianca's troubled young face, a vague instinct of repulsion and annoyance passed over him, prophetic of trouble and irritation to come; of vexation, and worry, and failure, in which Bianca was concerned, and for which her mother might hold him responsible.

Alas for poor Bianca! Her mother sat praying for her by the desolate hearth at home; desolate not so much by reason of her child's absence as by the absence of love, the thankless rebellion which had wilfully severed all ties, and had presumed, in unfilial-wise, to question and condemn the action of a devoted and blameless mother. The separation, Hero told herself, she could have borne, had love bridged over cruel necessity. But Bianca's conduct had been loveless and thankless, arbitrary, cold, and cruel. She had made her exit without one sign of softening; and Hero's tender nature felt at least as much wonder and horror at the

perversity of her child's act, as indignation, and wounded affection, and outraged maternity. Could she have believed that the love was still there, under eclipse, obscured, in abeyance, she would have taken heart of grace and waited in patience for light to shine. But the ruthless impatience of the girl's desire for freedom had stabbed Hero to the heart, had killed all faith in her child in the mother's bosom.

It was well that she could not see; little as she believed Bianca cared, yet it was, still good that she could not guess how little share the absent mother had in this fondly-loved child's thoughts. Whatever else the girl thought of, it was not of home.

Expectation, rebellion, and excitement had buoyed her up on her outward journey; novelty, the hope of good things to come. The winter in St. Petersburg she was determined to have, and she had compassed her ends; and since she had been domiciled with the Countess she had met Mellin continually, if with but slight recognition on his part. The confidences of Sprudelheim were not renewed between them. Once or twice she had referred to indifferent matters connected with that time. He had barely answered, and she, imagining she

had displeased him, or that he had reasons at the moment for reticence, let the subject drop. As yet no one suspected her secret; he least of all. Yet a feeling of intense irritation came over him as he met her eyes fixed with piercing scrutiny on his face.

Far from divining flattery in the girl's persistent gaze, or appreciating her devotion to himself, he turned from her with profound annoyance, mentally wondering at her unlikeness to her mother, and determined to avoid, as much as possible, coming in contact with a person so little sympathetic to him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HERO'S LAST SONG.

PERHAPS no man, and very few women, can understand the nature of an enthusiastic young girl's first love, especially where that love is given in secret and unsolicited. Many of us may be able to call to mind the grotesque infatuations of our youth; our insane prepossession for a particular form of nose, limp, cast of the eye, grizzled occiput, carroty beard, manner of pronunciation, stammer, lisp, laugh, accent, or what not, that caused the object of our youthful predilection to differ from his or her fellows. For it is one of the characteristics of this form of youthful folly, that it generally selects some slight defect (not considerable enough to amount to deformity, but sufficiently departing from the general rule to be piquant) in the object of its adoration. Nor is the sex of the idolised, as a rule, of any importance.

A young relative once confessed to me a frantic admiration for a small scar or bran-like blemish on a fair cheek; and the Sabbath devotions of her pupil were considerably interfered with by the little curls at the nape of her French governess's neck (which rose in stately unconsciousness above the back of the pew), as the maiden, amidst much laughter, in later years avowed. A niece loved one of her aunts with a rapt and delighted adoration, simply because that lady could not pronounce the letter R; and a gallant admiral, with a cast in his eye, appeared during several months to be the most fascinating of beings to a girl who afterwards preferred twin orbs of vision.

Given two ordinary eyes, and the spell is broken. Replace the 'W's' with good rolling 'R's,' and the enchantment vanishes. If we are to believe the result of inquiry, these follies of fascination are by no means uncommon phenomena, nor is the eccentric experience confined to a deluded few.

It is quite certain that it enters largely into that condition which we call being 'in love.' Even the defects of the adored object then become graces in the eyes of the adorer, or we should not see and hear the funny things we

continually do from infatuated lovers. With Bianca the infatuation was not grounded on any childish folly of the kind referred to; but it was none the less the product of her own imagination, and as such scarcely susceptible of reason, and certainly not to be argued or demonstrated away.

In the vast mosaic daily growing under Mellin's hand, every infinitesimal chip of stone, no matter what its shape, size, or colour, had, or would eventually have, its use and place. Poor little Bianca Martello, with her stupid rebellious little heart and impatient ignorance, had been a very small fragment indeed for such a great artificer to pick up; it had no merit but that of having lain in his route, and, rather than kick it aside, he stooped to its level and added it to the specimens already in his bag.

When a man of a certain age, a man of the world (who knows 'Society' and 'Life' in all their phases), condescends to notice a girl whom very few have in any way noticed so far—boys of her own age because they despise every created thing wearing a petticoat, and older men because the maiden is still in the school-room, and therefore, as yet, to be ignored for a time—the girl is very likely to form exaggerated

ideas of her own importance and of the discrimination of her hero. She invests him with a thousand exalted virtues, which would make him the deadliest of prigs did he really possess the accredited attributes; she endows him with graces which not even the fondest mother in her weakest moment would be capable of discerning in him; she believes that for qualities and capacities the world has never known his equal, and she associates everything grand and good, beautiful and sublime, with his name. Then comes the attitude of the man to her, his humble handmaiden. Marriage and the tame commonplaces of material existence never enter into a girl's mind so long as this is the condition of her being. No sordid cares as to ways and means need degrade the demi god, or bring him off his pedestal, or cause him to show his feet and hands of clay in the ignoble search after bread and cheese. It is the old story of Jupiter and Semele. The god condescends to her lower estate. She worships him behind the cloud, and waits till he shall reveal himself. He speaks and she obeys; she anticipates his wishes, flies to carry out his commands. His approval sets, she believes, a sign and stamp upon her. He, who has known lovely women

of all ranks and ages, unbends to approve her. His notice is the Hall-mark that confers rank. He may not signify approval in words, the fact of his holding speech with her is enough to convey his estimate; the girl's vanity is flattered and gratified, excited and soothed, in the most delicate, the most delicious manner, by her own imagination. Probably the man would indignantly deny ever having spoken an appreciative word to her in his life, or cast so much as a passing thought in her direction. He has been kind because it is his nature to be so, and because there was no reason why he should be unkind; because she is young and pleasant, fresh and frank, a gently-nurtured maiden, and as such entitled to consideration. Perhaps he has unconsciously encouraged her by a word of cheery approval. If he has done so it is probably the remembrance of his own loveless, cheerless youth that lends an unwonted tenderness to his tone of recognition. She may even remind him of a playmate-sister, or a little first Love long since departed to the land of spirits.

Something after this vague, impersonal, unseeing fashion, Mellin had been kind to Bianca. Then he had recognised in her mother the heroine of that one brief infatuation, the sole

romance of a life that had had nothing 'for itself' in all the waste of past years—the 'impossible she' of a hopeless fancy. Some vague idea that fate might take him to England; some romantic, improbable, beautiful vision of an English 'home,' with its large and liberal surroundings, had softened him at Sprudelheim into a more personal and less frigid frame than was his wont. Then Julie de Kerezoff had recalled him to duty and 'the Cause' by one or two winged words, and with all a woman's practical sense had seen how to make Bianca useful.

'These English are so generous, so inflammable, and, despite their phlegm, such enthusiasts!' she said. 'Anyone may have their money for the asking, and we are fools if we do not take what others may and will, if we don't; for we need funds sorely.'

But after a time, as we have seen, the contributions ceased to flow in, and then Bianca, being of no more use, she had passed insensibly away from Mellin's consideration and every-day memory. A special place in it she had never held; there was no disloyalty in this 'desertion'; he had other and weightier matters to attend to, and the little Anglo-Italian, if she ever

crossed his mind, served only to make him sigh over the folly of a dream that had lasted even less time than our sleeping visions are said to do.

With that peculiarly tenacious patience which is a characteristic of the Russian character from the *moujik* to the minister, from the peasant to the prince, he had pursued his course unwaveringly, ungrudgingly, from year to year. *Ohne Hast ohne Rast* had been his motto. He who labours for Humanity must needs learn to wait. There was none of the ardent hopefulness which we are wont to associate with enthusiasm. There was rather an abiding touch of melancholy endurance that was but a hair's-breadth removed from despair. He had learned to labour and to wait.

The very articles of his political creed condemned him to renounce all personal ends and ambitions. Solovieff, it was true, had married a wife and left her, pursuing his pilgrimages across Russia, from north to south, from east to west, preaching the secret propaganda, received everywhere, so soon as he judged it wise to reveal himself, with a wild rapture of enthusiasm. He arrogated nothing to himself for obeying the old apostolic rule. Scrip and shoon,

bread and shelter, the necessaries of life, were always forthcoming for him; had he needed luxuries and so much as held up his finger, plenty would have poured in upon him. But Solovieff was a man whose life might terminate violently any moment of any day; and thus he needed to take no thought for the indefinite 'morrow,' which would surely 'take thought for itself.'

And there were many Solovieffs in the land.

But to Mellin this test of devotion to 'the Cause' had been mercifully spared.

He had seen in Hero the one woman who had ever stirred his imagination or quickened his pulses. He could picture to himself how blest would be the lot of a man who could associate such a woman with his pursuits and duties, but he had never for one brief moment believed that he could be that man.

Some vague expressions let fall by Hero as she leant over the parapet of that far Rhineland castle, and looked down upon the fertile valleys and frugal homesteads, on the cities, towns, and villages, had shown that she, too, understood that vast dumb cry of Humanity, crushed down by a Fate too universal to be defied, too hopeless to be rebelled against, yet

rising, it might be not unnoted, to Heaven. The words she had spoken revealed capabilities which, as Mellin told himself, might have rendered invaluable assistance, and yet, most probably, would never be utilised. She, like many another noble-hearted woman, would go down to her grave not dreaming of the amount of energy lying dormant within her, which, under other circumstances, might have been taught to work incalculable good to thousands outside the narrow sphere of home and family, but not, therefore, necessarily, outside the sympathy of good men and women.

The sight of Bianca, whose very existence was in so far forgotten that, unless recalled to his mind by extraneous circumstances, he had ceased to be aware of it, produced in him an involuntary sense of irritation that plainly betrayed itself. He was cold and unwilling in manner to the girl, whose eagerness, in spite of herself, beamed in every feature of her countenance, in every change of her anxious inquiring glance.

Because she reminded him of the one woman he had any trouble in forgetting, he resented her presence; because a sense of excitement, restlessness, personal wilfulness,

indiscretion, a something not to be defined, yet still less to be ignored, gave him a sense of danger and disquietude in Bianca's presence, he avoided her. Mellin loved repose. His was, in all things, the negative method. He preferred obtaining his ends by fair means. Foul were only to be used in the last resort, when everything else should have been unavailingly tried. As certain springs run underground, their course unsuspected until some accident of the *terrain* brings them to light, so the channels of his mind and will lay deep hidden from the general eye, his agents unsuspected, his associates unrecognised, his actions uncompromised. Bianca, with her restlessness and imprudence, introduced an element of insecurity into things of which he was nervously aware. He blamed himself for having allowed Julie de Kerezoff so far to initiate the girl that he had found himself pledged to allow her the privilege of that grim Order which bound her to their Cause. Intuitive dislike, or perhaps, more justly speaking, dread of the possible consequences of her undisciplined nature, gave his manner, always cold and reserved, a tinge of animosity. When circumstances forced him to recognise Bianca, he did no more than bare

politeness demanded; and more than once, finding her eyes fixed upon him with an expression which he could not define, he had impatiently left the drawing-room where they were, resolved so to speak that when next chance brought them together she should take offence, and thenceforth and for ever ignore his existence.

But when the time came, and opportunity offered, he felt that he had no ostensible reason for insulting a young lady, a stranger, by undue harshness of speech or roughness of manner. She was under the protection of the Countess Perowsky, the most powerful woman, in certain senses, in St. Petersburg, and one on no account to be offended. He would simply ignore Miss Martello. She could not force him to speak to her if he did not choose; and he would give a hint to Julie de Kerezoff to look after her *protégée*.

'How have you offended Mellin?' the little lady asked of Bianca. 'He says you are not to be trusted; you are imprudent, impulsive, and that you will get us into trouble.'

This Bianca felt to be hard. In what sore trouble had *she* not been, and then to be accused of imprudence! Had she betrayed

one word. Had she not resisted all entreaties and threats, and remained loyal in spite of everything?' The tears welled up into her eyes. She dashed them indignantly away.

'Did he tell you to say that?'

'Well, not exactly. Something of the kind. You must not irritate Mellin.'

'*I* irritate him?'

'Well, don't take the initiative in anything; don't make a show of intimacy with him. Just send a message to him to say that you will be careful.'

'I shall send no such message.'

'Why not?'

'I shall speak to him myself.'

'Then you will simply make matters worse. Mellin hates a scene. He despises women, and he certainly will not enter into explanations.'

'You seem to know a great deal about him.'

'I do.'

Then Bianca turned silent and moody; and jealousy and suspicion worked still further mischief in her mind. She was silly enough not to see that her hostile attitude to Madame de Kerezoff could scarcely engage that lady's suffrages in her favour; and though Julie was

too much in earnest, too much worried by anxiety in her own family and affairs to attribute much importance to the waywardness of a spoiled child, yet the annoyance she felt did not fail to colour the report of the scene which she gave to Mellin.

'She is utterly impracticable.'

'As I feared.'

'No, not in that way. I believe she is to be trusted; but these young people are fatiguing with their exactions and fancies and airs and graces. Everything is a matter of personal vanity and offence with them.'

And so the matter dropped.

Bianca, when she came to think things over, saw that she had been foolish. She rushed to the other extreme, and decided to feel herself honoured by Mellin's thinking her of sufficient importance to send messages to her through a third person. She avoided him so ostentatiously, and gave him bows of such extraordinary stiffness, that the Countess Perowsky rallied her on her dignified attitude.

'I thought Mellin was an old friend of your family, my dear,' she said; 'you treat him with as much *hauteur* as if he were a young spark whose attentions you wished to dis-

courage. Baron Mellin is a "personage." We all show him respect, and as he is old enough to be your father, and not so much as vulnerable in the heel, you can afford to be at your ease with him.'

Put upon her guard, Bianca strove to modify her manner, and partially succeeded. Then she had met Esther Rodostamos, and unable to deny her extraordinary beauty, witness of the adulation offered her on all sides, and wearied with the stories told of her fabulous wealth and entire independence, jealousy took a concrete form, and settled down with a steady hatred of the heiress, that was all the more profound because necessarily silent.

Thus she had maliciously tried to vex Graham by calling his attention to Esther's 'flirtation' with Mellin, whereas it was only her own sore angry heart that she was agonising. She felt herself to be badly used all round. Why had the Countess not placed her next to Mellin, and seated Graham and Esther together? All St. Petersburg knew about the portrait—about the mad infatuation of Orestes and Pylades, as the two Englishmen had been nicknamed—and now Mellin, too, who was reported to enjoy the

heiress's confidence and to direct her wealth into channels of his own selection, he, also, must be made to fall before her chariot wheels!

Nursing her wrath, the poor angry child was eating her proud heart out, and beginning to recognise that in a crowd she was yet utterly alone. And alone, by her desolate hearthstone, sat Hero, and reviewed the past.

Fortunately for her, before Bianca's departure Mr. Owen had sailed for San Francisco, entrusted by a company which was in process of formation with the task of fully reporting upon a huge mining property then in the market, and which certain speculative financiers intended bringing out in London (should all go well). Affairs had not been arranged so smoothly as the sanguine Irishman had anticipated, and matters were still being negotiated. Hero, in reply to his reasons and excuses for remaining absent, urged him to stay as long as was convenient, for, she added, the winter in England threatened to be unusually severe, and he would do well to avoid it.

This fortunate absence of her father, though it left her in bitter solitude, yet saved her from all embarrassing explanations. It also gave her time to brood incessantly, to examine,

question, and reproach herself, first on one count, then on another. It was no wonder if, in her isolation, her mind dwelt much on the past, and especially on that portion of it, brief and delusive as the happiness had proved, when her heart rose up and spoke for itself, asserting the rights and claims so long denied. She remembered her mother's affection for, and confidence in, Graham; she recalled his tender consideration for her, his loveless, ruined life, and she accused herself of coldness. She had been rich in parents and child; her daily life was full of the companionship and sympathy of a sweet and noble woman; she had her art; she had her baby girl to work for, to think of, to prank out in delicate attire, to play with, to pray for. Nay more, deep down, somewhere in those mysterious depths (that only rare soundings reach) of the mother's nature, she was aware there had been a time when she was almost thankful for the barrier existing between herself and Graham. Should not her child always be first with her? Was she not bound to be father and mother both to this little blossom, whose fragile life had lent fresh beauty at its darkest hour to her own? Could it be right that this 'child of her mother only'

should ever be supplanted—nay, that could never be!—but should ever share the mother's affections with little brothers and sisters born under happier auspices, richer by a good father than this forlorn little one?

Hero had felt, in those earlier days, that to tell the man she loved he must not claim the first place in her affections was scarcely a prudent or a kindly answer to the love which, on his part, he offered unconditionally. And she had secretly acknowledged to herself the mercifulness of fate in sparing her the ungracious and unwelcome task. She told herself that, in the unreasoning, unquestioning happiness of her newly-found love she had been forgetful of her trust, and that her sin of oblivion had soon found her out and overtaken her. For a few short days she had thought only of Graham; she had looked neither backwards nor forwards. Love had come as a revelation, and her spirit had soared into the ether of an Italian heaven, and, poised like a lark, between the sky and the earth, had sung its song of rejoicing at Heaven's gate.

One of the darts in Truth's quiver, pointed with just aim, stopped that song and brought the singer to earth, never again so to soar,

long as breath might last. The ruin and the failure of one life meant now, the ruin and failure of two lives—or would have done so but that she promised Graham hers should prove he had not brought fresh misfortunes to her existence, nor completed the ruin which another had commenced.

Graham went his lonely way. Not heart-broken, for he believed in Hero's love, and told himself she was a woman to be waited for; a companion to be sought, though years might elapse in the seeking, and the quest be full of pain.

The World is very apt to say of a woman who leads a loveless life that she is 'cold-hearted.' If, by an act of imprudence, the woman forgets her apparent coldness of heart, the World stones her to death; or, should life prove tenacious, it turns its back upon her prostrate form, and, with a shrug of the worldly-wise shoulders, forgets her very existence. More than one of Hero's friends had reproached her with being cold-hearted; many of her acquaintances had repeated the glib criticism amongst themselves in hours of easy gossip. What would they have? Wives with adoring (or reputed adoring) husbands; matrons ex-

perienced, twice or thrice wedded, and rich in social knowledge of all kinds; brides of a month, whose honeyed moon is scarcely yet mooned out; *fiancées* who believe that they have a monopoly of love and admiration, health and happiness—these and many more prosperous persons of their kind are apt to call less fortunate women, starved of the love the fair cavillers prank themselves withal, 'cold-hearted;' and yet, were any warmth of heart visible, these female Catos would combine unhesitatingly in the virtuous works of 'cold shouldering' and censure, until their victim, 'done to death by slanderous tongues,' should seek mercy in place of the judgment that has dealt so hardly by her!

Fortunately for Hero, her mother and child gave the strength necessary to bid her lover farewell, and to stifle unavailing regrets in work that should make others happy, and remove the sense of uselessness from her life. Fortunately, too, Mrs. Owen's presence, and Graham's consideration for and tenderness of Hero's fair fame, helped to make her difficulty less; and as, year by year her child grew more and more of a companion to her, as the pet and plaything ripened into a tall, slim

young maiden—so that at thirty-four Hero looked like the seventeen-years-old Bianca's sister,—the mother had come to shrink timidly from all thoughts of love and marriage, to renounce all the prerogatives of Youth, and to resign every claim which might seem in any way to imply an unseemly rivalry between mother and daughter.

'I am older than my years,' she would say to her own mother; 'if I look younger I am all the greater sham, for I am conscious of a gravity and a greyness of spirit that make me wonder my hair is not white.' To herself she said that had the Fates permitted her and Graham to marry whilst Bianca was yet a baby, the girl need never have known, and would probably never have realised, that the husband was not also the father; but in the solitude of her own room, Hero's fair cheek blushed a deeper hue, now that it was too late. With a grown-up daughter, the thought of being wooed and wedded seemed to Hero something less than delicate, out of season, and forbidden by the inner canons of the spirit.

And yet, as she now sits and reviews the past, she sees that the man her maternal instinct had persuaded her to sacrifice to her child,

might have brought security to her troubled existence.

She had been ready to offer up the one love of her life, the love of a grown woman for a grown man; a man estimable and worthy, with all the manly attributes of honour, truth, tenderness, and courage likely to endear him to the woman of his choice; for the sake of a child to whom the magnitude of the sacrifice must, in the nature of things, remain for ever unknown

Before the task of uprooting Graham's memory could be accomplished, Bianca had, herself, rushed blindly at a pretext for that separation which to the deserted mother seemed little less than complete severance.

One or two friendly little notes she had received from Graham, assuring her that Bianca was well and in good spirits. At present that was all he could tell her; doubtless she often heard from the girl herself; he would write again.

So that Fate had given Bianca a protector in Graham, though she did not guess it, and Hero a comforter in the man whom she had mentally rejected. She could not guess that her child's angry and rebellious heart was beginning to turn homeward in its trouble, nor

did she recognise the first note of softened feeling in the *Nunc Dimittis* of disappointment.

'Dear mother,' wrote Bianca, disdaining superlatives as milk for babes, or sugar plums for spoiled children, 'I am now settled with the Countess Helena Perowska for the winter. She is a celebrated beauty, very religious, and very much sought after by everybody of note here. She receives twice a week after the theatre, and every evening from dusk onwards people drop in unofficially. I see very little of the Kerezoffs. She seems always busy, and theirs is a different circle. Still she comes. Baron Mellin is a stranger, not to the Perowskys, but in his manner to me. I don't think he would have noticed or recognised me, but the Countess called him and said I was staying with her for the winter. Now I shall give you a piece of news which will astonish you even more than it did me, for nothing astonishes one here very much. Mr. Graham is in St. Petersburg! He has been sent over by the English Government, and is doing something about art for the South Kensington people. His great friend is Lord Dovedale. They go everywhere together, and they are both

in love with the same lady. Mr. Graham knew her in Rome, years ago (she is twenty-three now, then she was fifteen or sixteen; I wonder if you knew her?), and he began a portrait of her then. He is doing another now, and one hears of nothing else. No one has seen it. But he goes there every day, and people are most inquisitive to know how it will end. Some say when the portrait is finished she will marry the painter. Lord Dovedale has offered to her again and again. She is enormously wealthy. Some people say she is a Jewess. Her name would not lead one to think so, but as Jews are so fond of titles, she is sure in the end to marry the lord, and become Marchioness of Matlock. That is what people say: I don't know, and only repeat it as gossip. For gossip there is nothing like Russian society. They sit in circles and scandalise; yet they are very good-natured, and don't believe half they hear or tell. Their gossiping propensities are only equalled by their indolence, *ljenj* they call it. I have heard you say the Irish are unapproachable in that way, but they are out-distanced by the Russians. Esther Rodostamos is an orphan. As she is romantic (as well as wealthy), she can marry to please herself.

I have heard twice from Princess Paul Karishkin. Everyone likes her. You cannot imagine how kind and simple these great ladies are, and amused with things that we should think childish. It makes them very engaging and easy to get on with. And so generous! They give as a matter of course, in that sort of way that you hardly know you are receiving a costly present. Do you ever see Fitz and the Hudsons? Give my love to F., and to my aunt, if he thinks fit. I hope by this time grand-P. is with you. You always liked solitude, but I should think even you had had enough of it by this time.—Ever, dear mamma, your affectionate daughter,

'BIANCA MARTELLO.

'P.S.—Your last song is sung in all the drawing-rooms here. Everything English is the rage, from literature down to pins.'

'You always liked solitude!'

If so, as Hero bitterly told herself, here was a fine prospect! She would be alone for the rest of her life. And, as pain laid an icy grip upon her heart, and strangled her cry of sorrow in a cruel spasm of the throat, the world and its troubles and deceptions faded away into

dim insubstantiality, and left her lying, white, silent, and motionless beside her solitary hearthstone.

'"Her" last song' was to be a lifelong solo!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TCHORNI-NAROD.

As Graham was returning from a 'constitutional' in the direction of Peterhof one afternoon, 'chewing the cud of sweet and bitter memories' as he trudged, wondering how it fared with Hero, and cursing the fate which kept him far from the only woman he had ever loved, he suddenly awakened to the fact of finding himself in a distant and unknown part of the town, and in the midst of a population entirely new to him. Preoccupied with his own thoughts, he had not noticed whither his footsteps tended, and it was only the unwontedness of his surroundings that at last broke in upon his meditations and roused him to a perception of the novelty of the situation. He was in the 'Seven Dials' of St. Petersburg, in the midst of the *Tchorni-narod*, the 'black people,' the great unwashed, the mob, the

plebs, the *hoi polloi*, that profoundly ignorant and strangely mixed floating population familiarly known in the city of the Neva, and self-baptised the 'black people,' which, white though it be, accepts a modified slavery, digs to-day and begs to-morrow, delves o'-Monday, and gets drunk on *quass* or *vodki* o'-Tuesday; flies like leaves driven before the wind, prostrating itself by the thousand, with faces biting the dust, and frantic shouts of '*Gossudar*, *Batyushka*!' on Wednesday; and on Thursday wrecks the train, or fires the palace, of the holy Czar, going to death and judgment with face as calm as fate, unmoved, indifferent. Living patient lives, on black bread, *vodki*, pickled cucumber, *Stehi*, and, when they can afford it, tea, with a squeeze of lemon, the 'black people' are for the most part silent. Wrapped in their sheepskin *touloupes*, the *ischvostchiks*, the *dvorniks*, or yardmen, and the *moujiks*, will take such lodging as heaven affords them, and during the greater part of the year sleep where and how they can—in summer, *à la belle étoile*; in winter, behind the stove or in the hay-loft. Now and again this patient, silent, long-suffering folk will be seized with active, unreasoning instincts of rebellion: some superstition out-

raged, some prejudice ignored, the temporary influence of a mob orator, helped forward by strong drink, and their wonted smiling apathy and gentle good-nature is merged in insensate fury. Nothing but overpowering force can master the tumult: reason is the last thing to be appealed to, for the very obvious fact that they have no reason. Brute force must subdue and bring them into bounds; superior power must dominate them. No one argues with children, and yet children find out (or used in earlier, happier times to find out) that they must obey. They accept the fact; they do not argue about the Why, and the Wherefore, of it.

Graham was conscious of a certain movement, a certain suppressed tension and excitement, an unwonted animation in the faces about him; and presently, as the crowd grew denser, and the compact masses began to sway to and fro, the pressure in the narrow street forcing him against a brick wall, carried him perforce to a corner where four converging roads met.

His very slight acquaintance with the Russian language, to say nothing of the *patois* spoken all around him, rendered it impossible for him to gain a clue to the cause of the uproar;

but an instinct of prudence told him that his wisest course was to follow the stream, and to keep as much as possible in the background. Not only was his intrusion as a stranger and foreigner into this obscure quarter likely to be resented by the *Tchorni-narod,* but his mere presence, as a man of higher rank, an aristocrat, would be likely to attract hostile attention.

Suddenly he became aware of the cause of the riot.

Coming towards him, down the centre of the crowded street, accompanied by a rabble of boys and girls, a group of men evidently in joyful possession of their prey, were haling some offender to justice. At the doors women, mothers of families, the wives and sweethearts of the men, stood loudly applauding, and as the shouts and jeers of the multitude came nearer, it was plain that not a pleading voice or pitying hand was raised in favour of the unfortunate delinquent.

Suddenly, the shrill cry of a terrified woman rent the air, rising high above the growling menaces of the mob, and the next moment he saw to his horror that the object of all this popular obloquy was one of the weaker sex; for, terrified and blinded with

fear, the woman stumbled and fell heavily to the ground, thus momentarily checking the onward movement of the procession, arrested by her prostrate form.

Renewed yells and cries encouraged her tormentors to fresh outrage: the men kicked her where she lay prone, urging her to get up that they might drag her to her destination; the women, like furies, applauded each fresh attack upon the helpless creature. Shocked, and yet fully aware of the utter futility of interference in such a case, where one man, alone, could do nothing effectual on behalf of the popular victim, and might only increase the tumult by untimely and unauthorised opposition, Graham looked round in hopes of seeing some friendly face, some guardian of the law to whom appeal might not unreasonably be made. Whilst he was thus engaged, a piercing shriek recalled his attention to the prostrate woman, who, goaded by her persecutors, had risen to her feet, and escaping from them at a sudden bound, had staggered blindly forward, and now flung herself at Graham's knees, clasping them with both her arms, as she appealed wildly to him in some unknown tongue for mercy and protection.

It was Chelanska!

He recognised her in a moment; he had seen her hundreds of times, curled up and waiting patiently in different antechambers for her mistress; holding Esther's pelisse until she came out, after paying visits. He had seen her knitting and sewing in a corner of one of the many rooms of Esther's house, within call of her young mistress, faithful, humble, patient as a dog. More than once she had surprised him by rising out of the floor of the sledge, where she had lain concealed waiting for her lady, who was shopping, or inspecting some hospital or orphanage.

How could he abandon the woman to her fate? Or rather, what could he possibly do to avert it? He could not tell. Only he laid his hand kindly on her shoulder, and bade her rise.

'The Jewess! kill the Jewess! give her carcase to poison the starving town curs, or to feast masterless mongrels! Show her how to murder Christian babes for her witches' Sabbath, and drink their blessed baptised Christian blood! Death to the crucifier of the Lord! Break her bones, and cast her as offal to the void, that the wolves and foxes and obscene

night-birds may prey upon her! Death to the Jewess! death to the vampire, the unclean beast branded with the eternal mark of the Almighty!'

The woman, her pale face bedabbled with blood, and convulsed with terror, her long black hair loosened and hanging in strands over her shoulders, her cloak in tatters, one shoe lost, held up her clenched hands in an agony of pleading to her merciless tormentors.

'Good people, hear me! I am no Jewess! I am the housekeeper of Esther Rodostamos, whom you all know is liberal to you, and loves the poor, the sick, and the suffering. Take me to her; she is rich; she is your friend; she will reward you. Spare me, good people! you are mistaken; I never harmed any of you! I am no Jewess. I am one of the *Dvorovie* of your benefactress. I am a Pole. I come from the good town of Warsaw. I was foster-nurse to my lady, and lived with her lady-mother. Ask the gentleman if what I say is not true!' And cringing and trembling the poor wretch fell again upon her trembling knees.

'Witch, sorceress, heretic, false tongue, liar! She says she is no Jewess! Did we

not see her coming out of the synagogue? Did she not look at Michael Charkow's boy, and did he not wither, perish, and die? Hold your foul tongue, hag of hell, and hope for no more mercy from us than you and yours showed the dear Lord, for which take the curses of Christendom!'

Stones began to rain and hail from all quarters. The blood was streaming down Chelanska's pallid face; a flint cut Graham's lip, and he clearly realised that it was a mere question of time ere they were torn limb from limb, since no word he could say had any meaning for the infuriate mob. He stooped to Chelanska, and made her understand that there was a door behind him, and that if he could open it backwards unperceived, there was for her yet a chance of escape.

He bade her crawl from his feet, and if she could only succeed in getting in, to bolt the door on the inner side, and leave him to chance.

This whispered colloquy enraged the mob to the point of exasperation. Who was this foreigner (for foreigner they perceived him to be) that he should rob them of their lawful prey? 'Away with them, away with them!' was now the cry.

It was no longer a question of the woman alone. A fresh shower of missiles, rattling on the walls and the wooden door behind them, proved to Graham that not a moment was to be lost.

Suddenly, a carriage drawn by two black horses, whose driver whipped them up to unwonted speed, dashed through the swaying, shouting crowd, dividing the clamorous multitude in its headlong course. Everyone instinctively moved to get out of the way. In the carriage were seated two ladies, and Graham could not but fear that the pace at which they were going would prevent them from realising the truth, or perceiving the dangerous situation in which Chelanska and he found themselves. But just as he lost all hope of attracting their attention, at a word which reached the ears of one of the two ladies, the carriage stopped.

So sudden was the check to their swift career that the horses fell back upon their haunches, foaming at the mouth, quivering and trembling in every limb.

The Countess Helena Perowska and Esther Rodostamos sat side by side, both deadly pale, both perfectly self-possessed; only in Esther's eyes shone a light that told of courage and

indignation, and a sense of outrage far stronger than fear.

Her quick eye took in the whole situation at a glance, and, as Chelanska's hoarse voice came wailing up from the pavement, where she lay crouched at Graham's feet, a thin thread of blood trickling down her livid face, her hands cut and bleeding, 'I am no Jewess, I am a Pole, good people; I am a Pole of Warsaw,' Esther sprang indignantly to her feet.

'What!' she cried in an impassioned voice, standing upright in the carriage, and tearing off her veil as she spoke, 'what! you good Christians, you followers of Christ; you, who profess mercy and whose gospel is one of peace and goodwill, you men, shame upon you! You women: worse than wolves! You turn upon a poor, lonely, weak creature, and in fifties and hundreds band together to stone her to death, to hound her to destruction! Out upon you for cowards! Out upon you for ingrates! What Chelanska? You deny that you are a Jewess to please these brutal Christians, these Pagans, whom every good Christian would scorn to call his brethren? Look at me! I am a Jewess! I am of the race that gave you your Lord! I am of the race of His

mother, of Her who lived and died a Jewess, subject in all things to the Jewish laws! I am of the race of the apostles; they were all Jews, Jewish fishermen, humble, hard-working men, day labourers toiling for daily wage like yourselves; not Princes of the House of Israel, not prophets, priests, or kings, but labouring men, workers, toilers, men and women of the people. Who, in all your crowd, does not know me? Has Jewish money not built your hospitals, nursed your orphans, fed your sick, and aged, and poor? What man or woman ever came to me that I cast him or her out, because he or she might profess and practise Christianity? Jewish gold you have never been too proud to take, and you were right, because it was offered freely, as a sister offers to her brothers who are one with her, and knows no difference of faith or race. Styro Rodostamos was a Greek, he was of your faith, he worshipped in your churches; he baptised me, his daughter, according to the rites of your religion, and if I declare myself to be a Jewess, it is that I may show you I am of the same race as the poor, faithful, timid creature you, in your ignorant bigotry, in your darkened fanaticism, in your shameful savage cruelty, have well-nigh hounded to

death. If you must needs stone Jewesses, stone me, Esther Rodostamos! Then you will murder someone worth murdering; you will sacrifice the offending mistress, not the inoffensive maid. I am at least bigger game; and, if our race be all our fault, I am equally guilty with Chelanska!'

There was a pause and deep sullen silence in the crowd.

'Come here, Chelanska!' said her mistress, too indignant as yet for tenderness to modify her clear, loud, ringing tones. 'Be so good as to help her, Mr. Graham,' she added, in her every-day voice, turning with her every-day manner to Chelanska's silent champion.

Her face was aglow with emotion. Her honest indignation and scorn had paralysed the dull thick-skinned mob, whilst excitement lifted her, as regarded the populace, far above all every-day considerations. Her heart was full; she had not yet done with the crowd.

As she stood looking into the sea of upturned faces below, Graham said to himself that she was perfectly noble, touched with some finer essence, tuned to a higher courage and to a nobler tone than belongs to the woman of every day.

'If I claim kinship with the poor and the despised, if I declare myself to be of a hated and persecuted race, why is it?' she went on. 'You at least, my men, who are labouring men, should feel more friendly towards me since I espouse the cause of them who toil and struggle, "bearing burthens grievous to be borne." And you women, you who are mothers, or who have been mothers of men whose lives were one long labour, you ought not to hate me, since it is for *my* mother's sake, and in memory of her whose face was like that of the humble and yet honoured Jewish Maiden, whom you all adore, that I join myself to her people, and declare myself one of them.'

The crowd, shaken in its convictions, still hung back, ashamed, part resentful, part convinced, half-unwilling, half-ungrateful, wholly quelled. Graham was helping Chelanska into a place by the side of the coachman.

'One word more, my friends, and I have done. Beside me is the Countess Helena Perowska. Not one amongst you that has ever known sorrow, need, or sickness, but he also knows her name. In her good works she has allowed me to associate myself with her; we know of no difference of race or creed; we

acknowledge only one gospel, that of universal brotherhood, the strong succouring the weak, the rich helping the poor, the healthy saving the sick. If she accepts me, and you do not reject our united efforts in your sorrows and troubles, why should you reject *me*, who ask nothing of you but friendship in return for my own goodwill, and pity for my poor unoffending nurse and foster-mother?'

That which she had not been able to accomplish for herself, her allusion to Helena Perowska effected. They knew (the more intelligent amongst the mob) that they owed her other and greater things than the ostensible *largesse* of later years. They knew what Esther did not—that she had pleaded for, and procured, many a privilege for their despised and neglected class; had softened a heart less hard than hopeless, less harsh than despairing, to consider their complaints through many a by-gone year of disenchantment and failure. What in England would have been a cheer arose, as Esther pointed to the beautiful pale lady who had remained seated throughout the appeal of her friend. Helena bowed her gracious head like a queen, and calmly smiled her lovely, civilising, soul-subduing smile into

the grimy faces of the 'black people.' She did not rise, as Esther had unconsciously done, springing to her feet the better to dominate her hearers.

'My friends, I am ashamed of you,' Helena said, in her clear, bell-like tones. 'We are accused of being barbarians. I see we deserve the reproach. This gentleman,' pointing to Graham, 'comes from that England of which you would not so much as know the name, save for the good Russian blood spilt in a hopeless fight against the brave enemy we had unjustly provoked. He can claim compensation, by the laws of the land, for this outrage; the magistrates can fine and imprison you; his is a great and powerful nation with which we are now at peace, and therefore you must expect to be all the more severely punished for your unprovoked onslaught on him.'

By this time all spirit had died out of the concourse; trembling and anxious, the foremost amongst the ringleaders hung their heads and shuffled nearer to the carriage, as they watched the very syllables falling from Helena Perowska's lips.

'Shall I plead with him on your behalf?' she continued, her voice soft and clear as a silver

flute. 'I do not promise he will forgive; you know best how severe would be the penalty imposed by law upon you. But the English are a generous nation, and if you promise to amend I will do my best——'

'We promise!' cried a hundred voices.

'Well, I will accept your promise. But that does not end the matter. This poor woman whom you have mangled, trodden under foot, maltreated, outraged, is the nurse and foster-mother of your benefactress, my friend, Esther Rodostamos. Without her your platters would have been empty, your cupboards bare, your hearths cold, your children crying many and many a winter's day. You all know that; and you all know that the law does not allow you to persecute an inoffensive person, because he or she is of another race than your own. Shall I beg the mistress to forgive you, and intercede with the maid that she lodge no information against you?'

'Yes, yes; beg for us, gracious Countess! If we go to prison our wives and little ones starve; we beg of "your nobility" to plead our cause!'

'Then remember,—if they consent to forego the justice they have a right to demand,—that

two outraged Jewesses are more generous, merciful, and Christian in their conduct than, to our shame be it spoken, a whole city full of pious Muscovites!'

'We swear, gracious lady, by all the saints; by our patron St. Peter, by St. Alexander, St. Nicholas, St. Andrew and St. Alexis, we swear to "your nobility" that we will offend no more;' and of those nearest to the carriage, one seized the Countess's veil, another bent to her hand, a third caught at the skirt of her dress, a fourth saluted a fold of her mantle, and all kissed the object grasped, with a servile adoration, Oriental in its fervour, humility, and abasement.

'Drive home!' cried Esther, to the coachman; and, leaning down to Graham, she whispered: 'Come to me later on that I may thank you. You are safe now, but the fury of the mob is spent; the first *likhac* we meet I will send back for you.'

She was pale with emotion.

Strangely enough, although intensely conscious of all that was going on around him, nay, acutely alive to every fluctuating phase of feeling in the crowd, Graham's mind had slipped from his control; and, by a process of

unconscious dual cerebration, a far-away day of his youth in England, the tones of a voice long unheard, the very essence and atmosphere of another time and of another place possessed and absorbed him, side by side with the drama that was being played out before his eyes.

'How strange,' he said to himself, 'that such a fancy should come to me at such a moment!'

A pair of bold black eyes, a hard mouth, a rasping unsympathetic voice seemed to be defying him with a brazen impudence that made his very soul sick. It was a relief to get into the carriage and be driven to his lodging. 'Why just then, and there?' he asked himself, perplexed by the feat of imagination.

As the last sound of the wheels died away, a woman in the crowd, who had been a spectator of the whole scene from beginning to end, though she had taken no active part in it, shrugged her shoulders impatiently, saying, in French, to the man on whose arm she leant: '*Est-ce bête? V'là que les princesses se mêlent à la canaille! Pourtant c'est dommage que Dom Quichotte ait échappé aux aménités que voici.*'

'*Le connais-tu?*' asked the man.

'*Si je le connais, par exemple! La bête de question! Mais cela n'y fait rien. Ce sera pour une autre fois.*'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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